NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

BALANCE OF POWER THEORY, IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S., IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA, AND A NEW ARMS RACE

by

Randall G. Turner

June 2008

Thesis Co-Advisors: Abbas Kadhim
                            James Russell

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		*Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188*
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.		
1. AGENCY USE ONLY *(Leave blank)*	**2. REPORT DATE** June 2008	**3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED** Master's Thesis
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Balance of Power Theory: Implications for the U.S., Iran, Saudi Arabia, and a New Arms Race		**5. FUNDING NUMBERS**
6. AUTHOR(S) Maj Randall G. Turner, USMC		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A		**10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER**
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.		
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited		**12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE**

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

As a study in the Bush Doctrine of preventive warfare, the conflict in Iraq has been of great interest. However, the unintended consequences and the impact on regional instability also demand attention. There is a balance of power struggle taking place between Iran and Saudi Arabia which, because of Iran's nuclear ambitions, has drawn the attention of the international community and the ire of the United States. As a result, policy makers in Washington are compelled to determine a course of action that would, at best, prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons or, at worst, return the region to a modicum of calm. Indeed, the issue has become the most divisive matter between presumptive presidential nominees Barack Obama and John McCain.

It is necessary then, to examine the behavior of Iran and Saudi Arabia against the tenets of realism and state behavior through the lens of political scientists John Mearsheimer, Kenneth Waltz, and Stephen Walt. By reviewing offensive, defensive, and balancing behavior within the Middle East system, the predictive analysis should enable policy makers to determine the appropriate measure of sticks and carrots that would achieve U.S. national interests in the region.

14. SUBJECT TERMS Balance of Power, Realism (Offensive, Defensive, Balancing, Buck-passing), Neo-realism, Arms Race, Iran, Saudi Arabia	**15. NUMBER OF PAGES** 115
	16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE** Unclassified	**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT** Unclassified	**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT** UU

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239-18

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

BALANCE OF POWER THEORY, IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S., IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA, AND A NEW ARMS RACE

Randall G. Turner
Major, United States Marine Corps
B.A., Arizona State University, 1996

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
June 2008

Author: Randall G. Turner

Approved by: Co-Advisor
                    Abbas Kadhim

                    Co-Advisor
                    James Russell

                    Harold A. Trinkunas
                    Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

iii

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

ABSTRACT

As a study in the Bush Doctrine of preventive warfare, the conflict in Iraq has been of great interest. However, the unintended consequences and the impact on regional instability also demand attention. There is a balance of power struggle taking place between Iran and Saudi Arabia which, because of Iran's nuclear ambitions, has drawn the attention of the international community and the ire of the United States. As a result, policy makers in Washington are compelled to determine a course of action that would, at best, prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons or, at worst, return the region to a modicum of calm. Indeed, the issue has become the most divisive matter between presumptive presidential nominees Barack Obama and John McCain.

It is necessary then, to examine the behavior of Iran and Saudi Arabia against the tenets of realism and state behavior through the lens of political scientists John Mearsheimer, Kenneth Waltz, and Stephen Walt. By reviewing offensive, defensive, and balancing behavior within the Middle East system, the predictive analysis should enable policy makers to determine the appropriate measure of sticks and carrots that would achieve U.S. national interests in the region.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank and recognize my wife, Courtney, who shared in the trials and tribulations involved in writing this thesis. She certainly should be credited for any improvement in my writing, as her advice and literary prowess proved invaluable during my time at the Naval Postgraduate School. I would also like to recognize my boys, Alexander and Samuel, for bringing me tremendous joy when I needed a break.

Very special thanks go to my mother-in-law, Elena, and my mother, Donnie, for coming to our aid whenever Courtney and I needed a little extra help during what proved to be a demanding curriculum augmented by the presence of twin toddler boys.

Lastly, I would like to thank and acknowledge Professors Russell and Kadhim for their guidance and instruction on this thesis. My gratitude is extended to all of my professors while aboard NPS who had a hand in refining my ability to think critically, which made my attempt at a coherent thesis possible.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

This thesis will examine the far-reaching consequences of the Iraq War on the balance of power in the Middle East. Various scholars assert that the United States has lost influence in the region as a result of the war and is less able to serve as the guarantor of regional security and stability. One of the results of the invasion is that Iran and Saudi Arabia have emerged as regional rivals, with both states now at the head of an alliance of regional states and (in Iran's case) non-state actors. It could be argued that the posturing between Iran and Saudi Arabia reflects classic balance of power theory and has resulted in a new arms race that, considering Iran's nuclear ambitions, has dangerous implications. The objective then, is to determine to what extent regional actors are acting in ways that are consistent with realist balance of power theory and the implications for U.S. foreign policymakers in this historically unstable but strategically vital region.

B. IMPORTANCE

Since the discovery of oil in the Middle East, the United States has pursued regional stability through a variety of instruments to protect its national interests in the region. Much of this has to do with the U.S. role as the world's wealthiest economy as well as the largest consumer of energy. The U.S., as guarantor of security, has helped create an environment in which the oil rich states have brought their product to market. One of the regrettable regional developments created by the flood of cash into these societies is that the funding has been used to support militias, corrupt politicians, and spread radical ideologies. The result has been a tenuous stability that has maintained the flow of oil but kept the region from achieving a lasting peace. While the Middle East has been wrought with religious conflict and political turmoil over the past sixty years, U.S. power and influence has helped maintain the predictable flow of oil to world markets.

Instigated by the U.S. under the Bush Administration's doctrine of preventive war, the Iraq invasion and subsequent occupation have disturbed the regional balance and

created an imbroglio with far-reaching consequences.[1] Iraq, which once served as a buffer between Saudi Arabia and Iran, is now regarded by some as a "failing state" and is the object of competition between Sunni and Shi'a Arab groups competing for control over Iraq's political institutions and, by extension, its oil resources.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are now engaged in activity that appears consistent with the realist international relations theory, with its emphasis on states seeking to create favorable balances of power.[2] Whether this will create a more stable Middle East remains unclear. The implications of the theory, however, is that each state will continue to pursue what it perceives as a stable balance of power that may result in the proliferation of nuclear arms in the hands of ideologically-minded regimes. In addition to seeking a nuclear program, Iran has been supporting proxy conflicts in Iraq and throughout the region in a show of support for its Shi'a brand of Islam. In response, Sunni-led Saudi Arabia has secured a multi-billion arms deal from the U.S. and has spent a lot of diplomatic energy reinforcing relationships with its allies in the Gulf.

In order to prevent a regional arms race in the Middle East, the overall question this thesis seeks to answer is: What are the implications for U.S. foreign policy of the changed regional balance of power in the Middle East?

C.   LITERATURE REVIEW

In the study of international relations, realist balance of power refers to the tendency of competing states to alter their perceived power posture in order to ensure the survival of the state and to promote the power of the state relative to rivals that pose a threat to national survival. Where equilibrium is not achieved, war is the likely result because one side may feel threatened by the perceived lack of relative power. While there are numerous theorists that seek to explain this paradigm, Kenneth Waltz, Stephen

---

[1] For more on preventive war, see James J. Wirtz and James A. Russell, "U.S. Policy on Preventive War and Preemption," The Nonproliferation Review 10, Issue 1 Spring 2003, 113-123. <http://www.informaworld.com/10.1080/10736700308436920> (June 3, 2008).

[2] For more on realism, see Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939; an Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan and co., limited, 1940); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations; the Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948); and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* (New York: Random House, 1979).

Walt, and John Mearsheimer are widely accepted as the preeminent political scientists regarding balance of power theory and its relevance to neo-realism.[3]

1.   Realism – Balance of Power Theory

As neo-realists, these political scientists accept certain assumptions regarding their analysis of states' behavior in the international system. The assumptions are as follows:

- States are principal actors in the international system;
- The international system is characterized by anarchy;
- The accepted behavior of states in an anarchic system is "self-help" in which states "must rely on the means they can generate and the arrangements they can make for themselves;"[4]
- Behavior of states in the international system is influenced mainly by external factors;
- States are rational actors;
- The international system "comprises independent political units (states) that have no central authority above them."[5]

Beyond these common assumptions, the theorists present decidedly opposing views on competing states' behavior in a realist system. Mearsheimer presents a theory of offensive realism as an alternative to Waltz' defensive realism, while Walt's primary focus remains on states' tendency to engage in balancing behavior.[6]

---

[3] Whereas *realism* is the belief that states are motivated primarily by the quest for economic or military power, *neo-realism* or *structural realism* is the belief that the international system is a constraint on state behavior and thus the amount of power a state can project is restrictive and will certainly generate a response from a competitor. Neo-realism is further broken down into offensive and defensive realism. Kenneth Waltz has written several tomes on the subject of neo-realism, most prominent among them is *Theory of International Politics.* Mearsheimer's contribution is *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* in which he introduces offensive realism. Stephen Walt is credited with expanding the discussion of balance of power theory in his book *The Origins of Alliances.* See John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001); and Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

[4] Waltz, 111.

[5] John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security,* Vol. 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994-1995): 10.

[6] For an examination of the differences between offensive and defensive realism, see Robert Jervis, Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate." *International Security,* Vol. 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 47-50.

a.   *John Mearsheimer – Offensive Realism*

In the realm of international politics, John Mearsheimer is most concerned with the behavior of the "great power" states and their tendency to seek power at each other's expense in what he calls offensive realism.[7] The foundation for offensive realism is that in an anarchic system the best guarantor of security is the maximization of power. Mearsheimer argues that the great powers are continually "searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal."[8] As such, it is absolute power that great powers seek to achieve and not power relative to competing states.[9]

Mearsheimer's contention that states seek absolute power with the ultimate purpose of becoming a hegemon in which they are the dominant power in the system assumes a large power gap between the hegemon and the second most powerful state in the system. However, this does not necessarily mean that the hegemon lacks an external threat. Hegemons do not want peers and seek to prevent other states from achieving hegemony. Hence, the hegemon will continue to seek advances in power to prevent other potential hegemons from achieving that status. Because states that conform to the paradigm of offensive realism are constantly seeking power, Mearsheimer argues that the multi-polar system – that with multiple great powers struggling to achieve hegemony—is more war-prone than bi-polar systems.[10]

---

[7] Mearsheimer does not discount the smaller states but claims the great power states "have the largest impact on what happens in the international system." Additionally, Mearsheimer identifies 'great powers' as those states with significant military capabilities that could "put up a serious fight in an all-out conventional war against the most powerful states in the world." For more, see Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,* 5.

[8] Ibid., 29.

[9] States concerned with the former are only concerned with the continued achievement of additional power while states that desire the latter believe in achieving a balance of power seen in defensive realism.

[10] Ibid., 338. Mearsheimer uses the example of the U.S. and the Soviet Union to demonstrate how the bi-polar system created the longest period of stability in modern history. His contention is that the multi-polar system is far more dangerous than a bi-polar system for three reasons: First, there are more opportunities for war, because there are more potential conflict dyads in a multi-polar system. Second, imbalances of power are more commonplace in a multi-polar world, and thus great powers are more likely to have the capability to win a war, making deterrence more difficult and war more likely. Third, the potential for miscalculations is greater in multi-polarity: states might think they have the capability to coerce or conquer another state when, in fact, they do not.

Mearsheimer believes that, as power maximizers, states are not satisfied with a balance of power and that the best deterrent for war is a balanced bi-polar system in which the two hegemons exert their influence over lesser states in order to prevent the likelihood of war. Furthermore, Mearsheimer argues that if deterrence fails, buck-passing, rather than balancing, is the preferred choice of states that do not wish to fight an aggressor.[11]

b. Kenneth Waltz – Defensive Realism

In contrast to Mearsheimer, Kenneth Waltz, in his seminal work, *Theory of International Politics*, argues that states are defensive in nature and rather than power, they first seek security. The anarchic system, he argues, is prone to war and international politics are far too dangerous for states to maximize power as John Mearsheimer purports. Waltz believes that those states that make power their primary goal open themselves up for aggression by other, lesser states. This is why Waltz has supported the slow spread of nuclear weapons as a deterrent for war.[12]

Waltz argues that in a conventional war, "states going to war can at once believe that they may win and that, should they lose, the price of defeat will be bearable."[13] However, nuclear warfare would render defeat not simply unbearable but catastrophic. Nuclear weapons give countries a feeling of security and dissuade states from going to war not for fear of what a state will do but rather what they can do. The international system, however, refuses to recognize that the proliferation of nuclear weapons will increase stability, mainly out of concern for irrational, non-state actors that could obtain the technology. Therefore, in order to achieve security, Waltz argues that the

---

[11] Mearsheimer spends a significant amount of time on balancing and buck-passing in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,* ibid, 267-333.

[12] Indeed, Waltz has written several articles and books which provide amplifying support of his theory. He posits that nuclear weapons are the ultimate deterrent to aggression and states that seek them are more inclined to be subject to international rules due to the high cost of entry into the nuclear community. See, Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better*, Adelphi papers, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981) and Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

[13] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities," Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, 6th ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 116.

international system induces states to engage in balancing behavior.[14] His claim is that a state's first concern is "not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system."[15] As such, balance is achieved when it is relative to the actor being balanced against within the same anarchic system. Therefore, when a state gains power through new technology or advanced weaponry, according to Waltz, it is not being offensive but rather balancing against the threat posed by the increase in power of competing states.

c. Steven Walt – Balancing

Steven Walt has perhaps contributed more to the discussion of balancing than any other political scientist. He is credited with restating "balance of power" as "balance of threat" which, scholars argue, more accurately depicts the paradigm and its influence on the international system. While it may appear to be an argument of semantics, Walt argues that states form alliances not to balance a perceived increase in power but as a response to the threat that that power increase implies.[16]

In opposition to Mearsheimer, Walt argues that balancing is more common than bandwagoning because states prefer to "join alliances in order to avoid domination by stronger powers."[17] Walt also claims that states prefer balancing because states place their survival at risk "if they fail to curb a potential hegemon before it becomes too strong" and because "joining the more vulnerable side increases the new member's influence [within an alliance] because the weaker side has greater need for assistance."[18]

Walt's theory on balancing supports that those states that seek security over power will engage in balancing. These states, according to Walt, "avoid appearing

---

14 In contrast to balancing, bandwagoning occurs when weaker states seek to maximize power by aligning with stronger states. Waltz and Mearsheimer address the differences in Theory of International Politics, 126 and *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,* 267-333, respectively.

15 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* 126

16 Walt, *The Origin of* Alliances, 263.

17 Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985), 5.

18 Ibid., 6.

aggressive" and enact policies that "demonstrate restraint and benevolence."[19] He argues a system in which bandwagoning is the norm is much more competitive since states in this system are power maximizers and are inclined to be aggressive if there is a perceived loss of power.

d.   Summary

Mearsheimer, Waltz, and Walt provide compelling arguments on the behavior of states in the international system using a realist context. While Mearsheimer supports an offensive realist viewpoint in which states are power maximizers and prefer to engage in bandwagoning, Waltz' contention is that states seek security rather than power and would rather balance against those states that seek power. Lastly, Walt explains balancing and bandwagoning as used by offensive and defensive realists. By using the paradigms provided by Mearsheimer, Waltz, and Walt, this thesis will determine the predictive value of neo-realism in an examination of the Middle East as it pertains to Iran and Saudi Arabia. In doing so, I intend to determine policy implications for the U.S. and recommend courses of action.

2.   In the Wake of Iraq: Balance of Power in the Middle East

As a matter of international relations and the realization of preemption as U.S. policy, the execution of the Iraq War has been of global interest.[20] Although the intentions of the U.S. appeared to be sound at the time, the multiple failures–the absence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the rampant looting and inability to maintain security immediately following the fall of Baghdad characterized by an insurgency and sectarian violence, "de-Ba'athification," and lack of a functioning government—suggest that the mission in Iraq has been an abysmal failure. Furthermore, in addition to the significant loss of life, by the end of fiscal year 2007, the Iraq War will have cost

---

[19] Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985)., 14.

[20] In a 2003 article for *Foreign Policy,* Mearsheimer and Walt argued that the war was unnecessary because relative the U.S., Iraq was simply too weak to pose a real threat and Saddam's past behavior demonstrated that a policy of "deterrence and containment would work." See Mearsheimer, John J., and Stephen M. Walt. "An Unnecessary War." *Foreign Policy*, no. 134 (February 2003): 50-59.

taxpayers over $450 billion and, at current troop levels, could exceed $1 trillion by 2009.[21] Despite the seemingly endless number of reasons to withdrawal from Iraq and lacking popular support from the Democrat-led Congress, In early 2007, President Bush committed an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq in an attempt to provide the security necessary for the Iraqi people to focus on strengthening the government. Whatever the outcome, Iraq's neighbors will have played significant roles and, therefore, any discussion regarding the withdrawal from Iraq should also address foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran and Saudi Arabia after Iraq. Because Saudi Arabia and Iran have long been considered the two regional powers in the Middle East, it is appropriate to measure recommended courses of action against balance of power theory in order to determine the likely results of U.S. action.

a.   Status Quo

Despite the Saudi royal family's poor record with regards to political rights and civil liberties, the U.S. has recognized the need to maintain its relationship with the Saudis. In the mutually beneficial relationship, Saudi Arabia has used its influence among the oil producing countries to maintain the flow of oil at reasonable prices while the U.S. has guaranteed the security of Saudi oil exports across the globe.[22] However, the argument to maintain the status quo is not based exclusively on oil. The U.S.-Saudi alliance has been a shared commitment to defeat a common enemy.[23]

During the Cold War, the U.S. used its alliance with Saudi Arabia to prevent Soviet influence in the Middle East and the potential disruption of the flow of

---

[21] See Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations since 9/11,* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, July 16, 2007) and Peter Orszag, *Estimated Costs of U.S. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and of Other Activities Related to the War on Terrorism* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Budget Office, October 24, 2007).

[22] This dynamic has changed considerably since 2001 as reflected by the sky-rocketing price of oil from less than $30 per barrel in 2001 to over $120 in May 2008. Among the factors credited with the rapid escalation in price are regional instability as well as the growing global demand due to the burgeoning middle class populations in China and India. Since January 2008, President Bush has twice met with the Saudi king to ask for an increase in oil production. The slight increase in oil production has done little to curb the rising price as oil neared $130 in June.

[23] Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

resources. Middle East scholar Maurice Lavian, a regular contributor to *Scholars for Peace in the Middle East* suggests that "The U.S./Saudi relationship has always been based on shared strategic interests rather than a mutual 'friendship'" but the recent events, particularly in Iran, have strengthened the relationship.[24] Rachel Bronson, a senior fellow and director of Middle East Studies at the Council of Foreign Relations recognized that the two countries were once allied in the fight against communism just as they are now allied against Iran.[25] Headlines suggest the accuracy and relevancy of this commitment as the U.S. recently announced a plan to provide a multi-billion dollar arms package to the kingdom in an apparent attempt to demonstrate a united front against Iran.[26] As the militarily weaker power, and despite resistance from its populace, Saudi Arabia has allied itself with the United States' in order to balance the threat of Iran.

Iran's quest for nuclear weapons is consistent with defensive realism and balancing. As long as the U.S. continues its support for Saudi Arabia, Iran will feel threatened and will seek security to balance against the perceived threat of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance. U.S. relations with Iran have been strained since the 1979 revolution and the crisis in which Iranian students overran the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held fifty-two Americans hostage for over four hundred days. As a result of the crisis, the U.S. broke diplomatic relations and in 2002, on the heels of the 9/11 attacks, in his "Axis of Evil" speech President Bush identified Iran as a government which sponsored terrorism and sought weapons of mass destruction.[27] Reports also indicate that Iran has been supplying arms and funding Shi'a insurgents in Iraq which certainly gives credence to maintenance of the status quo vis-a-vis Iran.[28] In a speech before the House International Relations Committee, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns stated that "no option is off the

---

[24] Maurice Lavian, "How Iran has Strengthened the U.S./Saudi Alliance," The Middle East Now, http://www.themiddleeastnow.com/ussaudialliance.html (August 6, 2007).

[25] Bronson, 353.

[26] Helene Cooper and Mark Mazzetti, "Rice Outlines Saudi Arms Package," *New York Times*, sec. Europe, July 30, 2007, < http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/30/world/europe/30cnd-weapons.html?ex=1186632000&en=72c03807fc0a7b94&ei=5070> (August 6, 2007).

[27] George W. Bush, "State of the Union Address," January 29, 2002 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> (August 7, 2007).

[28] Wright, Robin. "Iranian Flow Of Weapons Increasing, Officials Say." *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2007.

table" and suggested that if multilateral talks fail to achieve the stipulated goals, the U.S. would have no choice but to consider targeted sanctions.[29] In a show of strength and determination toward Iran, the U.S. conducted naval exercises in the Persian Gulf beginning in October 2006 and maintained two carrier battle groups near Iranian territory until August 2007.

The cited examples and current events demonstrate that it is the policy of the United States to maintain the status quo, thereby continuing its military support of Saudi Arabia while refusing diplomatic relations with Iran. Unfortunately, as long as the U.S. continues its support for Saudi Arabia, Iran will feel threatened and, according to defensive realism and Walt's theory of balancing, will seek security and attempt to balance against the perceived threat of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance. Thus, the status quo has not resulted in regional stability and Iran continues its apparent march toward nuclear power in true balancing fashion. The counter argument suggests that it is time to reverse course in U.S. foreign relations with both states.

b. A New Course

The overwhelming concern in the opposition camp is that by providing arms to Saudi Arabia, the U.S. appears to be solely supportive of Sunni Muslims. Shi'a-led Iran then, must improve its own security posture in order to balance the threat of its neighbor. Additionally, there is a concern that Saudi Arabian policies have fostered the Islamic fundamentalist characteristics evident in those Muslims who are committing terrorist acts and suicide bombings. There are a number of reports, including the Iraqi Study Group report, that show that not only are Saudis funding the insurgency in Iraq, but the majority of suicide bombers in Iraq are often Saudi citizens or practitioners of Saudi Sunni Islam.[30] As such, many scholars and journalists in Middle East studies have recommended an alternative to U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. In a 2004

---

[29] R. Nicholas Burns, "United States Policy Toward Iran: Opening Statement before the House International Relations Committee," U.S. State Department, <http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2006/62779.htm> (August 7, 2007).

[30] For more information, see James A. Baker and Lee Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report*, 1st authorized. (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), p 142. Susan B. Glasser, "'Martyrs' in Iraq mostly Saudis," *Washington Post*, May 15, 2005, sec. 15.

article in *The National Interest,* Michael Sieff suggests that the U.S. put real pressure on the Saudis to reign in Wahhabi extremists but stops short of recommending that the U.S. ask for a "shopping list" of reforms such as free elections, freedom of the press and other political goods.[31] Sieff believes that the U.S. should use its influence to shape Saudi policies, but he recognizes that it still serves U.S. interests not to perpetrate anything that could result in a toppling of the al-Saud family. Rachel Bronson agrees the U.S. should exercise its influence but takes it a step further. She recommends that the U.S. "should develop comprehensive social, economic, and political reform strategy that supports local efforts," because the "politicization of religion" has contributed to the creation of those that would commit terrorist acts.[32] In its "Policy Recommendations for the 108th Congress, the Cato Institute provided a litany of policy changes in order to pressure Saudi Arabia into political and civil reformation. The document states that the U.S. commitment to the al-Saud family is "a moral blemish and a practical danger."[33] According to Rachel Stohl of the Center for Defense Information, the arms sale to Saudi Arabia "may provoke Iran into accelerating its own arms purchases," and suggests that Russia and China may fill the gap left by the U.S. thus creating a regional arms race.[34]

As stated above, although the two states are engaged in proxy wars in Lebanon, Israel, Gaza, and now Iraq, the U.S. has maintained diplomatic distance from Iran. Many argue that by continuing to isolate Iran, Washington is pushing Tehran to react in a manner that is contrary to U.S. national interests and will only endeavor Iran to escalate the tensions. At face value, it appears that U.S. military posturing and refusal to hold talks has committed Iran firmly to its nuclear goals. That is why Ted Carpenter, of the Cato Institute, compares the Iran situation to that of the U.S. relationship with North Korea. In that case Washington made little progress until it finally agreed to multilateral

---

[31] Martin Sieff, "Sand in our Eyes: U.S.-Saudi Relations After Iraq," *The National Interest* (2004), 93-94.

[32] Rachel Bronson, "Rethinking Religion: The Legacy of the U.S.-Saudi Relationship," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2005), 129.

[33] Doug Bandow, "The U.S. Alliance with Saudi Arabia," *Cato Handbook for Congress: Policy Recommendations for the 108th Congress,* (Washington D.C.: The CATO Institute, 2007).

[34] Rachel Stohl, "The Saudi Arms Deal: Congressional Opposition Grows," Center for Defense Information, http://www.cdi.org/program/document.cfm?DocumentID=4057&from_page=../index.cfm (August 11, 2007).

negotiations, at which point a "crucial" breakthrough took place.[35] In March 2004 after conservatives won many of the seats in the Iranian parliament, David Phillips from the Council of Foreign Relations suggested that it was time for "pragmatism" in U.S.-Iran relations. He asserted that after the "Axis of Evil" speech, Iranians were worried that they were next. However, Iranians were relieved when Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage indicated that the U.S. would not seek regime change as policy. Phillips recommends that while the International Atomic Energy Agency should be working with Iran, "direct contact between the U.S. and Iranian officials is needed when it comes to Iraq."[36] In April of 2006, when asked why we do not have negotiations with Iran, Joseph Cirincione, from the Council on Foreign Relations offered a more visceral response. "The United States is not even talking to Iran yet. Why not? Why aren't we negotiating with Iran? We negotiated with Libya. We're negotiating with North Korea. We negotiated with Stalin and Mao. Why aren't we talking with Iran?"[37]

D.   METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This thesis will first examine the current crisis in Iraq as it pertains to its neighbors, Iran and Saudi Arabia, using the paradigm of balance of power theory.[38] According to this theory, states are predisposed to balance their security against neighboring states. For many years, Iraq served as the buffer between Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, since the fall of Iraq and the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops, Iran and Saudi Arabia are posturing to improve their security and power relative to the region. In order to identify potential courses of action for the U.S. with regard to the two states, this thesis will review a few instances that highlight U.S.-Iran and U.S. Saudi relations.

---

[35] Ted Galen Carpenter, "Talk to Iran; it's Working with N. Korea," OC Register, http://www.ocregister.com/opinion/korea-north-nuclear-1784725-iran-states (August 7, 2007).

[36] David Phillips, "Pragmatism Needed in U.S.-Iran Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/publication.html?id=6841> (August 7, 2007).

[37] Andre de Nesnera, "Experts Urge Direct U.S.-Iranian Talks to Resolve Nuclear Issue," Voice of America, April 28, 2006, <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2006-04/2006-04-28-voa52.cfm?CFID=186491434&CFTOKEN=96178073> (August 8, 2007).

[38] Balance of power theory is being applied as a sub-theorem of neorealism and, in particular, offensive realism in which both Iran and Saudi Arabia seek the optimization of power at the other's expense even if they contend to seek power strictly for defensive purposes and to balance against the threat posed by the other.

This thesis will examine: Operation Ajax in which the CIA supported a coup to install a pro-Western leader in Iran; the U.S. support of Iran during the reign of the Shah; the "Twin Pillars" policy of Nixon; U.S. overt support of Iraq and covert support of Iran during the Iran-Iraq War; and U.S. support of Saudi Arabia in the Gulf War. Finally, the thesis will examine the steps Iran and Saudi Arabia are currently taking to address their security concerns. The conclusion of this work hopes to provide a clear idea of what U.S. foreign policy should be with regard to Iran and Saudi Arabia.

This thesis will examine the works of academics, journalists, historians as well as insight from think tanks and the Congressional Research service. Articles from current newspapers, journals and magazines will be necessary in order to reflect indications of current policy.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

II. APPLYING BALANCE OF POWER THEORY IN THE MIDDLE EAST SYSTEM

The 1979 Islamic Revolution and subsequent eight year conflict with Iraq depleted Iran's economic and military power and stripped the state of its regional hegemon status.[39] However, after 9/11 and President Bush's inclusion of the state in his 'Axis of Evil' speech, Iran re-emerged as a player on the international stage. The current conflict in Iraq has further provided Tehran with the opportunity to establish itself as a regional power. To counter Tehran's attempts to gain influence in the region, Riyadh has ramped up its own efforts to establish a greater presence in Iraq. As a result, Iran and Saudi Arabia are currently engaged in a classic power balancing struggle in which both states seek enhanced regional power and influence. Iranian President Ahmadinejad's insistence on making Iran a nuclear state and his continual defiance of the international community further adds to the turmoil between the regional powers. This turmoil has global implications because, as balance of power theory suggests, a nuclear armed Iran will compel Saudi Arabia, and possibly other states in the region, to balance against the threat posed by Iran and will ignite an arms race in a highly volatile region. Therefore, in order to apply a predictive analysis for makers of U.S. foreign policy, it is prudent to examine balance of power theory's relevance to the current security dilemma that exists between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

This chapter will define the system in which Iran and Saudi Arabia exist and will relate the assumptions required of balance of power theory. Close analysis of the assumptions and their relevance to the two states will show that balance of power theory correctly applies to the current paradigm. The chapter will also set forth the views of three leading proponents of balance of power theory, John Mearsheimer, Kenneth Waltz, and Stephan Walt, and will define their models of offensive realism, defensive realism, and balancing, respectively. A review of balance of power theory and the states'

---

[39] Chapter IV will provide greater background regarding Iran's status as a global power and its ties to the United States.

application of the principles established by Mearsheimer, Waltz, and Walt will allow for a predictive analysis that can then be applied to the current crisis in the Middle East.

A.   ASSUMPTIONS

In order to begin, it is necessary to define balance of power as parity between competing states and their perceived relative military, economic, or political power, the achievement of which should promote stability. Thus, balance of power theory suggests that where a perceived disparity exists between competing states, a struggle will ensue to acquire power at the other's expense; historically, that struggle has resulted in war. Inherent in balance of power theory are several assumptions that establish the framework's relevance within the examined system. The restated assumptions are as follows:

- States are principal actors in the system;
- The system is characterized by anarchy in which survival is the primary goal;
- The accepted behavior of states in an anarchic system is "self-help" and states "must rely on the means they can generate and the arrangements they can make for themselves;"[40]
- States can never be sure about other states' intentions and thus their behavior is influenced mainly by their external environment;
- The international system "comprises independent political units (states) that have no central authority above them;"[41] and lastly,
- States within the system are rational actors.

1.   States as Principal Actors

In order to be used as a predictive tool, balance of power theory requires that great power states are the principal actors in the system.[42] As a point of reference, the U.S. and Soviet Union are the most recent and arguably the most prominent examples of great power states that, for nearly half a century engaged in the struggle to balance against each other. The U.S. and now defunct Soviet Union were global hegemons whose combined

---

[40] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 111.

[41] Mearsheimer, *The False Promise of International Institutions*, 10.

[42] In their books, Waltz and Mearsheimer address the assumptions necessary to render the theory useful. See Waltz, 118 and Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 29-31.

economic, cultural, military, and political influence was ubiquitous in the international system. In contrast, despite the possession of a good portion of the world's oil reserves, Iran and Saudi Arabia's hegemony in the traditional sense exists mainly within the region. Nevertheless, a balance of power is only possible between two states that possess substantial power, real or imaginary, which certainly qualifies Iran and Saudi Arabia within the Middle East system.

Because sanctions imposed by the United States and the United Nations have restricted its economic prowess, Iran's power is derived mainly from its military posturing. Iran's recent history is replete with examples of its attempts to establish itself as a regional military power. In addition to its status as the primary sponsor of international terrorism, Iran has played a prominent role in contributing to the instability in Iraq. Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi militia receives much of its support and guidance from inside Iran. Additionally, there are multiple reports of armed factions within Iraq receiving training and weaponry from Iran and numerous weapons caches found with labels linking them to the Iranian military.[43] In March 2007, fifteen British sailors and Marines, whose boat reportedly strayed into Iranian waters while on patrol in the Shatt al Arab waterway, were detained in Tehran for nearly two weeks. In January 2008, five Iranian boats harassed and provoked three U.S. warships as they passed through the Straits of Hormuz. The incident evoked a harsh warning from President Bush who also lodged a formal complaint with Iran through the Swiss Embassy in Tehran. Finally, the November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) stated with "high confidence" that Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 and President Ahmadinejad contends that Iran's nuclear program is strictly for energy.[44] Nevertheless, President Ahmadinejad has railed against the international community for its tacit support of Israel's nuclear

---

[43] For a more detailed list of Iran's meddling in Iraq, see Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Influence in Iraq,* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, July 9, 2007).

[44] National Intelligence Council, "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," National Intelligence Estimate, November 2007, <http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf> (January 8, 2008) 6.

weapons program which he considers a threat to Iranian sovereignty.[45] He contends that Iran should be permitted to defend itself and a nuclear weapon would be the ultimate deterrent to aggression. The amassed effect of Iran's actions indicate Iran's objective of becoming a dominant regional military and political power.

As Iran's primary regional competitor, Saudi Arabia's power is less derived from its military strength and more from the regime's religious role as the 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' as well as the state's economic power as the possessor of more than 20 percent of the world's proven petroleum reserves.[46] The Saudi ruler's role as the 'Custodian' is critical to the regime's religious authority and influence amongst the world's Muslim population. However, the regime has been the subject of numerous protests, demonstrations, and terrorist attacks for what is perceived as hypocrisy amongst the royal family that run contrary to strict Islamic teachings, that which the Wahhabi sect espouses. To counter the criticism, the regime has invested millions of dollars in preserving the Mosques and enhancing the *hajj* experience within its borders, all in attempt to further cement its religious authority and quell the internal threat.

It should be surprising that Saudi Arabia, a country that from 1999-2006 bought over $14.3 billion in arms from the U.S., more than any other country in the world. Despite this record, Saudi Arabia is still not considered a major military power.[47] Riyadh has been very successful in contracting out its defense against external threats, a point

---

[45] For his part, President Ahmadinejad has made several public speeches condemning Israel and denouncing the holocaust as a fabrication. For a list of his remarks, see Hussein D. Hassan, *Iran: Profile and Statements of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, January 16, 2007).

[46] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "The 2008 World Factbook: Saudi Arabia," April 15, 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html> (March 30, 2008).

[47] Richard F. Grimmett, *U.S. Arms Sales: Agreements with and Deliveries to Major Clients, 1999-2006,* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, December 20, 2007). Aside from Israel, Saudi Arabia has been the United States' most dedicated and discriminating purchasers of U.S. military technology. The Middle East has long been the recipient of American military might but since 1986 Saudi Arabia has spent over $70billion on the most modern and deadly weapons the United States has in its arsenal, with a spike in purchased occurring around 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait and more weapons were purchased for defense of the Arabian Peninsula. For more, see Richard F. Grimmett, *Conventional Arms Transfers to the Third World, 1986-1993,* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, July 29, 1994). Additionally, in 2007, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia agreed to an arms deal worth over $20 billion dollars. David S. Cloud, "U.S. Set to Offer Huge Arms Deal to Saudi Arabia," *The New York Times*, sec. A; Foreign Desk, July 28, 2007.

that will be expanded on later in the chapter. Indeed, the five branches of Saudi Arabia's military are focused first on combating the internal threat posed by anti-regime Islamic extremists and a distant second on regional threats posed by Yemen, Iraq, and Iran. Internally, the five branches of the military as well as the robust intelligence, paramilitary, and police forces are each ruled by senior members of the al Saud family and are part of an intricate system of checks and balances employed by the regime to ensure that no single branch of the military gains too much power and attempts to overthrow the king. Rather than conventional military might, Saudi Arabia's real strength exists in its ability to employ the oil weapon for vast economic wealth.[48]

In 1973, in a show of solidarity with its Muslim brothers over the crisis in Israel, Saudi Arabia cut off most its Western consumers from oil which initiated a global crisis and demonstrated to the world just how strong Saudi Arabia, the former client-state of the U.S., had become. Following the end of the embargo in which prices increase 300%, the market did not rebound but rather the price continued to increase giving Saudi Arabia and other oil producing states significant wealth. With the world's largest proven oil reserves, Saudi Arabia is also able to alter the world's oil production and thus affect the price of oil. As the world's largest consumer of oil, the U.S. has appealed to the Saudis to employ this capability on a number of occasions. Currently, Saudi Arabia is strengthening economic ties with Russia and China in an effort to attract more foreign investment and expand its consumer base to non-western markets, an indication that perhaps Riyadh no longer holds its relationship with Washington in the same regard as it did just a few years ago when the threat of Saddam Hussein loomed large. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia is still beholding to the U.S. for its defense and the U.S. continues to serve as guardian of the flow of the world's oil out of the region.

2.   The Anarchic System

The system examined in this work is regional vice international, however, the Middle East system is no less anarchic and prone to belligerence than the international

---

[48] Anthony H. Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, Saudi National Security: Military and Security Services-Challenges & Developments, Full Report, (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Working Draft: Revised September 30, 2004), <http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/sns_military.pdf> (March 30, 2008).

system as balance of power theory assumes. Indeed, the Middle East, with most of the world's proven oil reserves yet with scarce other resources, is subject to substantial competition among the states. As such, anarchy is pervasive and compels states to seek power at each other's expense. However, in the Middle East, it is religious ideologies that spark tensions and heighten the already insatiable demand for power.

The Sunni-Shi'a divide is the source of tremendous animosity between the regional powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran. With survival being a state's primary goal in an anarchic system, Saudi Arabia and Iran are constantly competing for power at each other's expense. Saudi Arabia is the most powerful player in a coalition of Sunni states that includes most of the Arabian Peninsula and has united in fear against the 'Shi'a crescent' of states led by Iran and includes Syria and Lebanon to a lesser extent. This helps to explain why Riyadh and Tehran have such an interest in Iraq, a state that had been secular under Baathist rule.[49] The states are competing not only for influence in Iraq but also for resources and to reclaim religious superiority and hegemony that was absent during the Ba'ath Party's rule. However, Iran's quest for power and its nuclear ambitions have raised the bar. In 2006, in response to the threat posed by Iran and under the same auspices espoused by President Ahmadinejad that their programs will be peaceful, all six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) of Arab States announced their intention to develop nuclear energy.[50]

3.   "Self-Help" and External Influences

The GCC states' effort to develop nuclear energy is an example of how states in a system marked by anarchy attempt to engage in self-help; that is to say that they "rely on the means they can generate and the arrangements they can make for themselves."[51] This

---

[49] According to the CIA 2008 World Factbook, Iraq is comprised of 60-65% Shi'a and 32-37% Sunni Muslims. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "The 2008 World Factbook: Iraq," April 15, 2008 <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html> (March 30, 2008).

[50] The six members of the GCC of Arab States are Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, and UAE, all predominantly Sunni states. In September 2007, the UAE made a deal with France to help develop a nuclear energy program while the other states are currently in negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency in order to initiate their plans for developing nuclear energy. For more, see Peter C. Glover, "Sunni States' Fears of Iran Trigger Middle East Nuclear Race," World Politics Review, November 7, 2007 <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=1323> (March 30, 2008).

[51] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 111.

assumption is arguable in a regional system considering that true self-help means that weak states which are struggling for survival can not be locked in a balance of power because a stronger state or superpower could come to the aid of the weak state or, through sanctions, deny it the use of any instrument that would serve its purpose.[52] However, in an essay on the regional balances of power in the Middle East, Benjamin Miller proposes that to allay this assumption it must be recognized that "regional balances of power depend on the way great powers are engaged in regional systems."[53]

To be sure, throughout the twentieth century the United States was the patron to client-states Iran and Saudi Arabia and formed its 'Twin Pillars' policy around the two states in order to foster stability in the region. However, Saudi Arabia is now the weak state that receives support from the superpower, the United States, to deter external threats. In 1990, Riyadh was concerned by the threat posed by Iraq and contracted out its external defense to the United States, a diplomatic maneuver Mearsheimer calls "external balancing."[54] The United States continues to exert its influence in the region primarily through its relationship with Saudi Arabia, which, according to the self-help assumption, contradicts the application of balance of power theory to the situation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is Benjamin Miller's contention that "only when the great powers disengage from a particular region is an autonomous regional system able to arise."[55] As if attempting to fulfill this model, Saudi Arabia is distancing itself from its Western ties even as it signs a multi-billion dollar arms deal. In a speech given at the Arab League summit meeting in March 2007, King Abdullah stated that "the American occupation of Iraq is illegal."[56] He also warned that constant instability in the region renders them subject to foreign, particularly U.S., intervention. The Saudi regime recognizes that its

---

[52] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118.

[53] Benjamin Miller, "The International System and Regional Balance in the Middle East," *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century,* eds*.* T. V. Paul, Michel Fortmann and James J. Wirtz, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 240.

[54] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 156

[55] Ibid.

[56] Hassan M. Fattah, "Saudi King Condemns U.S. Occupation of Iraq," *New York Times*, sec. International, Mar 28, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/28/world/middleeast/29saudicnd.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss> (April 7, 2008).

links to the West inherently tie it to Israel, a point that is heretical for the regime which stakes its legitimacy on strict Islamic teachings and an aversion of Judaism.

Conversely, Iran has been without the support of a patron state since the 1979 Islamic Revolution the cataclysmic event that severed the ties between Tehran and Washington. The fall of the Soviet Union a decade later assured that Iran remained without a sponsor. It is in that regard that Iran fits the category of a state endeavored to self-help. However, Iran's support of international terrorism has rendered it a target of economic sanctions and thus it is adversely affected by the great powers of the international system. The international community, in particular the United States, is committed to the denial of those tools which would serve Iran's purpose. Tehran's reaction to these external influences is to engage in "internal balancing."[57] Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Iran has increased its militant posture through the conventional operations mentioned above and through its persistent push for nuclear power. Indeed, Kenneth Waltz asserts that nuclear power is the ultimate balancing weapon and its development is the purest example of a state inclined to self-help.[58] After all, as the leading protagonist of offensive realism, John Mearsheimer, states, "in the nuclear age, great powers must have a nuclear deterrent that can survive a nuclear strike against it, as well as formidable forces."[59]

According to Mearsheimer, and demonstrated by Saudi Arabia and Iran in the examples above, states can never be sure about other states' intentions and thus their behavior is influenced by their external environment.[60] Hence, the Middle East is entrenched in the security dilemma in which states that are "unsure of another's [states]

---

[57] Balancing will be discussed later in the chapter. However, for an explanation of internal balancing, see Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 157.

[58] Waltz' argument is that, because the stakes are so high, states that possess a nuclear weapon are less likely to engage in conventional war and thus nuclear proliferation is actually a stabilizing force. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. For more, see Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 160. and Art and Waltz, *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, 483.

[59] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 5.

[60] Ibid., 31.

intentions, arm for the sake of security and in doing so set a vicious circle in motion."[61] Iran and Saudi Arabia are engaged in an arms race as they seek to balance against the power of the other by buying more arms or developing advanced weapons technology. This unrelenting pursuit of power defined the bipolar world for fifty years and contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union but only after populating the globe with weapons that could destroy the earth several times over. The arms race between the United States and Soviet Union is the classic example of a security dilemma played out in the international system between great power states. However, a precedent exists for the security dilemma to reach nuclear proportions between regional powers.

Rooted in religion and illustrated by the current dispute over Kashmir, India and Pakistan have been arch rivals for decades. In the 1970s, Pakistan and India initiated their nuclear programs and early on it appeared that India had the edge when it tested its first nuclear weapon in 1974. Nearly twenty five years later, the regional arms race reached its apogee when, in 1998, India conducted two major tests and was followed just days later by Pakistan which conducted six tests officially announcing its ascension into the nuclear community. Pakistan was compelled by India's early success to balance against its power much like Iran's current push for nuclear weapons compels its regional rival to seek alliances or purchase arms that would balance against Iran's resurgent power. These states exist in a system that is prone to anarchy, and thus are compelled to engage in self-help; and because they react to the environment around them, they seek power, often at the expense of their competitors, and aim to prevent rivals from gaining power at its expense.[62] Because for many years the Cold War defined the international system, regional conflicts were, in effect, proxy wars between the two superpowers making the tension between Pakistan and India an anomaly. Although the international system lacked a central authority over the two superpowers, their hegemonic influence served in that capacity for most regional systems and protected states from each another.

---

[61] The term "security dilemma" was first coined by John Herz in 1950 John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950), 157. The quote is from Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* The quote continues to say that states, "having armed for the sake of security…feel less secure and buy more arms because the means to anyone's security is a threat to someone else who in turn responds by arming."

[62] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 3.

4.   The Lack of a Central Authority

As close to a central authority that currently exists, the United Nations seeks to ensure, "by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest."[63] Additionally, since the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States has remained as the world's last superpower and exercises its authority as the largest consumer in and principal defender of the global economy on which the international system depends. Indeed, during the strife between Pakistan and India, Washington reacted to the nuclear tests by halting U.S. aid to both states and imposing economic sanctions in attempt to prevent the further proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region. However, neither the U.N. nor the U.S. could prevent the states from seeking power at the other's expense. The two states retained their nuclear arsenals and Washington has since opened up relations with both states.[64]

In its Twin Pillars policy, the United States exercised its hegemony over Saudi Arabia and Iran, two diametrically opposed regional powers, and maintained a tenuous stability throughout the 1970s. Because Iran's geographic location proximate to the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia's oil supply were critically and strategically important to the United States' relevance as a global power and as a balance to the Soviets, the "policy relied on Iran and Saudi Arabia to serve as the two key protectors of U.S. interests" in the region.[65] As such, in addition to arming them as the bulwark of its anti-Soviet policy in the region, Washington was endeavored to serve as arbiter between the natural enemies and ensure that the two states were appropriately balanced against each other.

In 1979, however, Islamic fundamentalists led the revolution that ended the patron-client relationship between Washington and Tehran and disavowed the notion that the United States was the central authority in the regional system. Furthermore, because of its continued support of international terrorism and rejection of U.N. Security Council

---

[63] United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," United Nations, <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/> (April 3, 2008).

[64] Relations with India and Pakistan and the west witnessed a rapprochement when their cooperation was deemed critical to the war on terror. Subsequently, all U.S. sanctions were removed in October 2001.

[65] Howard Teicher and Gayle Radley Teicher, *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm: America's Flawed Vision in the Middle East from Nixon to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1993), 29.

resolutions, Iran is an anathema to the international system in which the United Nations serves as the de facto central authority. The further Iran alienates itself, the more it will engage in self-help and be inclined to develop the ultimate defensive weapon. Indeed, Iran's Foreign Minister recently issued a statement declaring that its military is "strictly defensive [in] nature and serves stability and security in the region."[66] However, Iran's defiance of international norms comes at the expense of its own security and threatens regional stability. President Ahmadinejad's comments regarding Israel render Iran a pariah among the international community except by those states which indulge in the same ideological beliefs, a point which calls into question Iran's rationality.

5. Rational Actors

Critical to any discussion on balance of power theory and its predictive value is whether or not states are rational actors.[67] That is to say, do states conform to the assumptions listed above and are they motivated by their survival as well as the quest for power at the expense of all others; or are they led by religious ideologues motivated by messianic impulses whose interest in the earthly realm is merely preparation for an otherworldly existence. It is arguable that Islamic Fundamentalism is considered rational within the parameters of Islam and the teachings of Muhammad. However, within the scope of the international system dominated by secularism, on which most Western governments are founded, religious ideologues—Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or otherwise—inherently lack rationality.

Despite having theocratic governments based in Shari'a Law which would presuppose irrationality, historically, the Saudi and Iranian regimes (the 1979 Islamic Revolution notwithstanding) have behaved rationally in order to preserve the state and

---

[66] RIA Novosti, "Iran Accuses Bush of Trying to Destabilize Persian Gulf," Russian News and Information Agency, March 4, 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20080403/102906079.html> (April 3, 2008).

[67] For more on the rational actors, Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, in *Essence of Decision,* offer an exhaustive analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the decision-making process that nearly led the world to nuclear war. In the book, Allison concluded that "actors" or governments, evaluate a set of goals and, as rational decision-makers, choose the goal with the highest reward. See Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis,* 2nd ed., (New York: Longman, 1999). In his book, *The Silent Language,* Edward Hall examines "the ways in which man reads meaning into what other men do." Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language,* (Anchor, 1973), 51. Both books endeavor to explain more about rational actor theory than this thesis is prepared to do.

advance their respective power within the international system. However, the imbroglio in Iraq has altered the status quo and necessitates a reexamination of the regimes' recent comments and actions in order to determine if Saudi Arabia and Iran are behaving rationally. Only then will strategists know if the assumptions prerequisite to the application of balance of power theory are relevant and then be able to apply analytical rigor to the development of courses of action in response to the implications the theory posits.

An examination of Riyadh actions reveal that it is adept at playing power politics to placate critics while acknowledging its ideological basis in order to stem internal criticism. This dichotomy renders Saudi Arabia in a perpetual condition of unrest whereby peace is maintained only through the cooptation and coercion of the population bought through rents collected from the state's vast oil wealth. The regime though, is shrewd in its assessment of the duplicitous nature of its relationship with the West and its potentially perilous position. Although Riyadh realizes that the patron-client relationship it enjoys with Washington is critical to its staying power, since its employment of the oil weapon in 1973, the regime is skillful at recognizing when it is appropriate to engage in power politics in order to appease its internal critics. Meanwhile, the regime's religious authority, exercised in the form of oppressive *fatwa* and enforced by the domineering *mutaween,* is exploited primarily to stifle potential domestic uprisings. Indicative of a state that behaves rationally in order to ensure its very survival, the al-Saud family balances its internal and external conflicts by deft vacillation between religious state and political power player.

Contrary to Saudi Arabia, the question of Iran's rationality is much more nebulous and subject to interpretation because of its affinity to act in accordance with religious principles. Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Tehran's interest in global politics has been motivated primarily by its reincarnation as a state led by an Islamic fundamentalist regime. As such, fundamentalist doctrine demands that all *kafir* states be destroyed and the world thrown into chaos in anticipation for the return of the Twelfth Imam, known as the Mahdi, who upon his return will lead his oppressed followers into a universal peace "and usher in a perfect Islamic society in which truth and justice

prevail."[68] The apocalyptic overtones are indeed alarming but, similarities to Christianity aside, this agenda as a matter of state policy is inherently dangerous whether or not it is apocryphal. Indeed, a review of actions and comments from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad will show that there is ample proof to support Iran's commitment to this notion.

When Khomeini returned from exile to assume a leadership role in post-revolutionary Iran, in addition to assuming the title '*imam,*' his followers used messianic symbols and language to empower Khomeini. In *The Shia Revival,* Vali Nasr explains the title imam and its opposing connotations between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

> In Sunni Islam, the title 'imam' simply means leader "as in those who lead prayers at a local mosque. For the Shia by contrast, it is a much more evocative term, conjuring up images of Ali and his eleven descendants…In Iran, references to 'Imam Khomeini' not only raised him above other Ayatollahs but equated him with the saints.[69]

Nasr goes on to assert that Khomeini and his followers' actions were specifically designed to evoke the return of the Twelfth Imam and to frame support for the revolution and the republic it founded as a choice between "absolute good and absolute evil."[70] Capitalizing on his self-created religious authority and building on the success of the revolution, Khomeini extended his reach beyond Iran and initiated a global Islamic movement. Fundamentalist organizations throughout the region received financial support and spiritual guidance from Tehran and executed Khomeini's will in which Israeli and American interests were targeted.

After Khomeini's death in 1989, Iran continued to provide support to these organizations but newly elected President Rafsanjani toned down the Islamist rhetoric as he was most concerned with recovering from the economically and militarily damaging Iran-Iraq War. Indeed, in sharp contrast from the anti-capitalist and anti-western rhetoric espoused by Khomeini, Rafsanjani and his successor, Mohammad Khatami, advocated a free market economy as the cure to Iran's ails and won their elections on the promise of

---

[68] John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, Rev. 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 304.

[69] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 130-131.

[70] Ibid., 131.

liberalizing the economy. However, in 2005, with the economy still floundering, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was able to win the presidency on a populist grassroots campaign that appealed to the poor. Whereas Rafsanjani and Khatami maintained a conservative Islamist approach to foreign affairs, Ahmadinejad's term as president has been mired with foreign policy issues underscored by the return to fundamentalism and messianic impulses.

At the UN, in his first speech to the General Assembly in 2005, President Ahmadinejad articulated, among other things, Iran's nuclear ambitions as a peaceful endeavor and, without specifically naming names, criticized those states that would prevent Iran from achieving that goal. Ahmadinejad denounced "those hegemonic powers, who consider scientific and technological progress of independent and free nations as a challenge to their monopoly on these instruments of power."[71] The speech was interlaced with messianic innuendo and culminated with a prayer to "hasten the emergence of…that one that will fill this world with justice and peace."[72] In a harbinger of the scornful rhetoric that was to come, Ahmadinejad attempted to establish Iran as a peaceful nation and "a true symbol of democracy" and accused the United States of violating the nuclear proliferation treaty by arming the "Zionist occupation regime."[73]

Since his speech at the General Assembly, President Ahmadinejad's contempt for Israel is well-documented. Speaking at a press conference in Saudi Arabia, he claimed the holocaust was a "myth" and later called for Israel to be "wiped off the map."[74] Ahmadinejad has since been told by Ayatollah Khamenei to curtail the inflammatory rhetoric not because he does not share the same ideals but because the Ayatollah fears internal disruptions between Iranian conservatives and reformists. Nevertheless, Ahmadinejad's comments are cause for alarm and are especially disconcerting when it is

---

[71] Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, "Full Text of President Ahmadinejad's Speech before General Assembly, Sept 17, 2005," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2005/iran-050918-irna02.htm> (April 09, 2008).

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] David R. Sands, "Ahmadinejad Calls Holocaust 'a Myth'," *The Washington Times*, sec. WORLD, December 15, 2005.

considered that Iran is actively pursuing technology that could cause Israel to vanish as is his hope and prophecy upon the return of the Mahdi.

Ahmadinejad is convinced that the 'Hidden Imam' will return in his time and has steered his policies to reflect that belief. So much so that, in a speech before congress he stated that Iran "should define [its] economic, cultural, and political policies based on the Imam Mahdi's return;" and, according to his former first deputy, Parvis Davoudi, Ahmadinejad asked his cabinet members to pledge "their allegiance to the Mahdi in a signed letter."[75] This story was also cited on a Farsi-language news website *Entekhab* which later stated that Ahmadinejad's quest for nuclear power is intended to assist in creating "an atmosphere of global turmoil to signify that the Mahdi will come soon" and lead the world to justice and peace.[76] Ahmadinejad's perspectives have been the source of criticism from theologians and former officials alike who claim that he is using religion and provoking the United States in order to engender support from the population where his popularity is waning due to his domestic economic failures.[77] Nonetheless, his religious rants laced with apocalyptic suggestion are enticing the equally theologically motivated Bush administration into confrontation, a point that begs the

---

[75] Richard Ernsberger Jr., "Religion Versus Reality," *Newsweek,* December 12, 2005, 28.

[76] Alireza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 31. In 2007, Ahmadinejad again addressed the General Assembly, but no longer disguised his rhetoric with euphemisms when he opened his statement with prayer in which he said, "Oh God, hasten the arrival of Imam Al-Mahdi and grant him good health and victory and make us his followers and those who attest to his rightfulness." See, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, "Full Text of President Ahmadinejad's Speech before General Assembly, Sept 26, 2007," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2007/iran-070926-irna01.htm> (April 9, 2008).

[77] In *The Iran Threat,* Jafarzadeh states that many Shiite clergies believe that Ahmadinejad's claims to have seen the Mahdi are heretical. See, Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*, 31. Additionally, former nuclear negotiator Hassan Rowhani has been a vocal critic of Ahmadinejad claiming that the President's comments are "hampering Iran's development and harming national interests." See, "Iranian Official Slams Ahmadinejad," Associated Press, February 27, 2008 <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/02/27/world/main3885202.shtml> (April 12, 2008). Even ex-President Rafsanjani who now serves as advisor to Ayatollah Khamenei has been critical of Ahmadinejad's ignorance of the economy and failure to tackle the inflation issue in Iran. See Parisa Hafezi, "Iran Ex-President Slams Ahmadinejad on Economy," Reuters, December 21, 2007, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKHAF14640220071221?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0> (April 12, 2008).

question of Ahmadinejad's rationality.[78] Critics of this assessment, however, deny Ahmadinejad as irrational and claim that his anti-Zionist rhetoric and saber rattling toward the U.S. and U.N. are part of his carefully crafted plan to invoke nationalist fervor.

In his book entitled, *Treacherous Alliance,* Trita Parsi asserts that, since 1979, Tehran has used ideology to successfully achieve its nationalist objectives as well as realize regional superiority and global relevance.[79] As such, Khomeini and Ahmadinejad invoked fundamentalism in order to rally support from within during the revolution and, later, to distance Iran from those states believed to be surrogates of the West. As natural adversaries of the Sunni Arabs, Tehran is inclined to provide for the defense of the Shi'a in the region, which, with consideration to Saudi Arabia's alliance with the nuclear armed U.S. and Israel's nuclear weapons program, justifies Iran's quest for nuclear power. However, Iran has been pragmatic in its quest as indicated in the December 2007 NIE. Demonstrating a concern that it would be next on President Bush's list of countries to invade, the report notes that Iran succumbed to "international pressure" and suspended its nuclear program shortly after the U.S. invaded Iraq.[80] Parsi and other critics of Washington's aggressive approach to Iran suggest that Iran's suspension of its nuclear program under the threat of its very survival indicates a pragmatic realism that belies irrationality. However, the suspension occurred before the ideologically motivated Ahmadinejad came into power and intelligence estimates would not discount the complete termination of a nuclear weapons program.

---

[78] In the U.S., President Bush is the subject of similar criticism from those who charge that his faith precludes his ability to make sound foreign policy decisions with regards to the situation in the Middle East and the Global War on Terror. President Bush referred to the latter as a "crusade" against terrorism. For more, see Peter Ford, "Europe Cringes at Bush 'Crusade' Against Terrorists," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 19, 2001 <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0919/p12s2-woeu.html> (April 12, 2008).

[79] Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[80] It is certainly indicative of rational behavior that "Iran halted the program in 2003 primarily in response to international pressure indicates Tehran's decisions are guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic, and military costs." National Intelligence Council, "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," 6.

Others that support the notion that Iran has embraced realism argue that a nuclear weapons program is an expected and natural reaction to the military threat posed to it by Israel and the United States and politically and economically by Saudi Arabia.[81] What has developed is the 'chicken or the egg' dilemma in which it needs to be determined if Iran is a threat to regional stability because of its pursuit of nuclear powers and Islamic fundamentalist roots. Or if Iran believes it needs nuclear weapons to serve as the ultimate deterrent to regional adversaries bolstered by the formidable United States which has clearly stated its ire for Tehran's policies and ideological principles. With regard to the other assumptions listed above and based largely on Iran's reactions to the external influences on its sovereignty, it would appear that Iran's behavior is consistent with realism and balance of power theory; therefore, it must be considered rational behavior. The variable, however, is President Ahmadinejad who continues to spew his scornful rhetoric laced with messianic and apocalyptic messages. Trita Parsi argues that this is deliberate and Ahmadinejad is nothing more than good theater and that his vitriol has strategic motivations. Nonetheless, with tensions in the region as high as they are, misunderstandings and misinterpretations can incite adverse consequences. Regional power players, whether they believe the threat is real or an act, will undoubtedly feel compelled to balance against it as suggested by neorealism and balance of power theory.

B.   PROPONENTS OF BALANCE OF POWER THEORY

With the assumptions established and their relevance applied to the paradigm, this chapter will now turn its attention to balance of power theory and three protagonists whose discourses on the subject define the parameters in which power states behave. To that end, it is hoped that the examination of the distinct but related theories will offer predictive conclusions for the Middle East as the regional power states, Saudi Arabia and

---

[81] In addition to Trita Parsi, Ray Takeyh and Thomas Barnett argue that ideology has ceased to play a big role in Iran's foreign policy. In *Hidden Iran,* Takeyh contends that Iran is not motivated by ideology but rather engages in "saber rattling" in order to "shore up wavering domestic support." Thomas Barnett has also suggested that Iran is engaging in power politics and seems to support Waltz' notion that a nuclear armed Iran would help stabilize the region. See Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 1st ed. (New York: Times Books, 2006); and Thomas P.M. Barnett, "Securing the Middle East with a Nuclear Iran?" *theGlobalist.com*, January 24, 2006 <http://www.theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=5076> (June 3, 2008).

Iran, contend with one another in the post-Saddam environment. John Mearsheimer presents offensive realism as an alternative to Kenneth Waltz' defensive realism, while Steven Walt's primary focus remains on states' tendency to engage in balancing behavior.

1.   Mearsheimer – Offensive Realism

The bedrock principle of John Mearsheimer's work on offensive realism is his belief that status quo powers do not exist in any system; rather, power states are "always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal."[82] This is critical to understanding offensive realism because it puts the impetus on power states to proactively seek power regardless of other states' intentions. As such, Mearsheimer believes that a system in which there are multiple competitors for power is far more dangerous than a bipolar world. This is especially true when one of the states engages in a quest for hegemonic power. As the state approaches hegemony, its power relative to others in the system is a stabilizer because no other states in the system are strong enough to pose a threat. However, this gap in power could lead the weaker states in the system to engage in alliances and balance against the hegemon. The constant struggle for power at the expense of others results in the aforementioned security dilemma of states and defines the current situation in the Middle East.

In the centuries preceding the formation of Saudi Arabia as it is known today the al-Saud family's history of exercising military might to impose its dominion over potential adversaries throughout the Arabian Peninsula is well-documented. In the twentieth century, however, the modernization that empowered Europe overlooked the Middle East and the region was colonized by the militarily stronger West. After World War II and colonization succumbed to nationalization, the region was never fully industrialized and security was outsourced, primarily to the United States. With militaries that were primarily defensive in nature, the Middle East states possessed one viable offensive weapon in their arsenal. The 1973 oil crisis demonstrated to the world just how powerful and critically important the region had become to the global economy. As such,

---

[82] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 29.

Riyadh effectively employed the oil weapon to achieve its economic and political goals. Indeed, Saudi Arabia's ability to influence the price of oil renders it the most dominant economic force in the region and a regional hegemon. Because its influence extends throughout the global economy on which the U.S. draws its power, Washington is therefore compelled to provide Saudi Arabia protection from external threats.

Although Iran also benefitted from employment of the oil weapon, the 1979 revolution and war with Iraq the following year prevented it from establishing itself as an economic power. However, although economically damaging, those watershed events helped define Iran as the political and military power it is today. As the leading Shi'a state in the region, Iran is compelled to serve as the balance to the predominantly Sunni regimes that are largely aligned to the West. Because sanctions continue to limit Iran from developing economic relations with most Western countries, Tehran has opened relations with China and India, two states that desperately need Iran's energy resource and do not carry the same political baggage as the United States. Additionally, because Saudi Arabia is protected by the dominant U.S. military, Tehran is obliged to expand its military as well as provide support to those agents that execute its intent through proxy conflicts aimed at weakening the U.S.-Saudi alliance. Indeed, its involvement in Iraq as well as its current quest for nuclear power is certainly attributable to Tehran's desire to expand its military power at the expense of its Sunni neighbor. Thus, offensive realism supports that a nuclear Iran virtually ensures its survival and makes it the most powerful state in the region.

Although Mearsheimer believes that a bipolar world is safer than a system of multi-polarity, he recognizes the potential for an arms race as each state competes for power at the others expense. This prescient point was made evident last summer when Washington announced a $20 billion arms deal to provide Saudi Arabia with advanced weaponry while other Middle East states seek to balance against a nuclear armed Iran with their own nuclear programs. Although the former circumstance in an unfortunate consequence, Kenneth Waltz, and proponents of defensive realism, argue that the proliferation of nuclear weapons actually contributes to stability.

2.   Waltz – Defensive Realism

Whereas Mearsheimer asserts that an anarchic system compels states to seek power, Waltz claims that states, being defensive in nature, merely aim to survive and, therefore, must first seek security. Certainly this involves awareness of shifts in power since the struggle for security implies maintenance of the status quo. As such, self-help states that act defensively are forced to obtain power in order to balance against a perceived threat and return to a stable system. In this sense, if Iran believes it is threatened by the United States or even Israel, its pursuit of nuclear weapons is consistent with defensive realism. To this end, Waltz believes that the spread of nuclear weapons as the ultimate deterrent would actually lead to a more stable Middle East.

In *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate,* Waltz argues that the spread of nuclear weapons amongst power states serves as a deterrent to offensive behavior and, therefore, results in stability. Certainly the Bush Administration's inclusion of Iran in the 'Axis of Evil' and subsequent U.S. invasion of Iraq gives Tehran reason to feel threatened. Furthermore, President Bush contends that a nuclear armed Iran is a threat to global security and has not ruled out a pre-emptive strike.[83] As such, President Ahmadinejad asserts that Iran's military is strictly a defensive force and recognizes that nuclear weapons would be the bulwark of its defensive posture. For this reason, it is no wonder he recently reported that Iran has not suspended its nuclear weapons program as the 2007 NIE stated but that it continues to move forward with the installation of 6000 new uranium enriching centrifuges.[84] Unfortunately, however, Iran's nuclear ambitions have unintended consequences on the regional balance of power.

---

[83] Because the U.S. military is far more powerful, Iran's behavior is indicative of a state that is merely attempting to balance against a superior adversary who has already demonstrated a proclivity for aggression. As such, Iran is further compelled to hasten its programs in order to ensure that the United States does not engage in what Waltz describes as a 'preventive strike.' Whereas a preemptive strike, like the one in Iraq, is designed to eliminate or reduce an opponent's ability to retaliate, a preventive strike is designed "to defeat an adversary before he can develop and deploy his full potential might." Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More may be Better*, Vol. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981), 4.

[84] Nazila Fathi and William J. Broad, "Iran Says it's Installing New Centrifuges," *New York Times* April 9, 2008,
<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1458865401&Fmt=7&clientId=65345&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (March 29, 2008).

Faced with the new threat presented by its historic adversary, Saudi Arabia is compelled to balance against it. Since the invasion of Iraq, the two powers have engaged in a subtle balance of power game in which Iran is attempting to reestablish itself as an international power while Saudi Arabia attempts to stifle Iranian influence in the region. However, Tehran's nuclear ambitions raised the stakes and threaten to launch the two powers into a nuclear arms race. In making his argument, Waltz recognizes states' propensity to balance against one another and that "new nuclear states may come in hostile pairs."[85] In fact, it is not without precedent; the escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan presents clear evidence of the consequences of regional competitors and the quest for nuclear power. Thus, Washington is not simply concerned with the possibility of a nuclear armed and hostile Iran, it is also worried that nuclear weapons will proliferate throughout the historically unstable Middle East as the Sunni dominated region is forced to balance against the threat posed by Iran.

3.   Walt – Balance of Threat

Critical to the examination of the Middle East system, Steven Walt offers an amendment to balance of power theory that attempts to explain why states will be compelled to balance against Iran. In support of Waltz' theory that states are more defensive in nature, Walt argues that states do not balance against power but rather against a perceived threat. Inclusive of that perception is the state's aggregate power as a sum of its population, technological prowess, and military and industrial capacity relative to others states in the system. Also included in Walt's formula is a state's offensive power and aggressive intentions. As such, Iran presents the greatest threat to stability in the region which is only intensified by its intentions to achieve nuclear status.[86]

---

[85] Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, 11.

[86] Walt, 165-171.

Waltz contends that there are a number of reasons why Iran seeks nuclear weapons, not least of which is the achievement of regional hegemony.[87] Because it is a Shi'a power and the primary state sponsor of international terrorism, Iran is an inherent threat to the region which is only amplified by its qualification as a revisionist state dissatisfied with its current station in the international system. In an article on regional balance of power, Benjamin Miller proposes that balancing should be the dominant feature of Middle East politics because most states in the system want to maintain the status quo and must curb the burgeoning hegemon before it becomes too strong and disrupts the system.[88] Therefore, the closer Iran comes to achieving its nuclear aims, the other states in the region will be more compelled to balance against the threat. That is, of course, unless the United States, as the world's remaining superpower, acts first.

C.   IRAQ AS A TEST BED FOR APPLYING THE THEORY

Inherent to every discussion about regional balance of power theory is how the great powers are engaged in regional systems. For over sixty years, the United States has been intimately involved in the Middle East and has had a tremendous impact on regional politics. Today, with the bulk of U.S. forces currently engaged in Iraq, that fact is no less true and the potential for a nuclear arms race in the Middle East rests heavily on Washington's involvement. In the next two chapters, this paper will examine the impact of Washington's influence on Iran and Saudi Arabia from the turn of the twentieth century up until the current imbroglio in Iraq. A thorough review is necessary to understand the political history that has resulted in the existing tensions. It will then be possible to examine the crisis in Iraq as a vehicle through which Iran is attempting to gain influence in the region at the expense of Saudi Arabia, and as a threat to regional and global stability.

---

[87] In *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May be Better,* Waltz gives seven reasons for a state to seek nuclear weapons: 1) because they are imitating other great powers; 2) out of fear that their great power ally will not retaliate if another great power attacks; 3) if its adversaries have them; 4) out of fear of its adversaries current or potential strength; 5) cheaper and safer alternative to conventional arms races; 6) offensive weapon; and 7) to achieve hegemony and enhance its international standing. For more, see Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More may be Better*, 7-8.

[88] Miller, 243.

III. SAUDI ARABIA

Despite fundamental differences in the perception of liberty and basic human rights, the alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia has been a marriage of convenience best described as *Realpolitik*. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a state founded on a strict Islamic fundamentalist doctrine and with a poor record of human rights, is among those few Middle East states that pose the least significant threat to the United States and has remained a loyal, albeit "problematic ally" in the region for decades.[89] What began as an economic partnership between U.S. oil companies and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia emerged as an alliance that served both governments. Saudi resources fueled the United States' ascension to superpower status and in return, U.S. military power stood as guarantor of Saudi Arabia's security. However, for much of the last sixty years, the United States framed its involvement in the Middle East first, in deference to its unflinching support for Israel, which Arabs consider the principal United States transgression and the root cause for the destabilization of the region; and second, within the context of the Cold War.

The Cold War caused U.S. foreign policy makers to not only ignore Saudi abuses of human or civil rights, but also disregard second and third order implications of parallel U.S. policies with its Middle East neighbors, particularly, Iran. Thus, when the Cold War ended and the United States emerged as the sole remaining superpower, the effects of U.S. policies in the Middle East—which made sense in the realm of bipolar politics—have come back to haunt the United States. The United States' turbulent relationship vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia and Iran threatens to upset the balance of power in the Middle East and launch the region into an arms race of nuclear repercussions. Because the U.S. was intimately involved in the formative processes that brought Saudi Arabia and Iran to power, it is undeniable that the U.S. will continue to impact the nature of the conflict. Thus, this chapter will review the history of Saudi Arabia's regional hegemony as a

---

[89] Alfred B. Prados and Christopher M. Blanchard, *Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations,* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, April 13, 2007).

product of U.S. foreign policy up to the current crisis in Iraq in order to identify the potential impact on the balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

A.   RISE TO HEGEMONY

In contrast to Turkey and Iran, whose Ottoman and Persian Empires are among the earliest examples of government known to man, the Arabian Peninsula was comprised of nomads, transitory merchants, and religious zealots who presented no real threat and the land—aside from the caravan routes that extended from the Red Sea to India across the northern desert—was a barren wasteland of no strategic or economic value to non-Muslims. Because Islam has its roots in Mecca and Medina, on the peninsula's western coast, the land has always been vitally important to Muslims, but it was not until oil was discovered that Saudi Arabia became relevant to the West. Soon after the discovery, Saudi Arabia became a strategic partner of the U.S. and a regional hegemon with profound global influence.

1.   An Alliance Forms

In 1940, the United States and Saudi Arabia opened full formal diplomatic relations with the focus on the development of oil drilling technology and education. However, the U.S. soon expanded the relationship and became the sole guarantor of Saudi Arabia's security, albeit for a price. Upon the conclusion of World War II, the U.S. emerged as a burgeoning superpower with a superior military and a navy that could police international waters and protect the delivery of Saudi oil. In the U.S., the Saudis found a sponsor that brought the fledgling state out of poverty, set it on the path of affluence, and aided in its achievement as regional hegemon. In return, the U.S. benefited from Saudi Arabia's influence within OPEC and its ability to affect the oil prices. Saudi Arabia's vast reserves enabled it to flood or limit the amount of oil available on the

market and thus, craft a mutually beneficial price. Despite the ideological divisiveness that exists between them, the U.S.-Saudi relationship was an example in realism of why states are encouraged to form alliances.[90]

Because the U.S. was considered the stronger of the two states, it would seem that the Saudis were the main benefactor of the relationship. However, as a result of the alliance, the U.S. secured access to a vital resource, garnered a foothold in the region, and prevented competitors—particularly those with a geographic advantage over the U.S.— from gaining influence in Saudi Arabia. A rising superpower and offensive in nature, the U.S. sought absolute power when making the alliance despite their fundamental political and ideological differences. In contrast, it was vital to the stability and growth of Saudi Arabia that it possessed a deterrent to any state that threatened it. Hence, the Saudis were simply trying to provide for their own security and acting defensively when they formed the alliance with the U.S. Over the next several years, the conditions that initially defined the alliance remained the same but its purpose changed in the post-WWII environment defined by global bipolarity.

2.   Eisenhower Doctrine

In his treatise on alliances, Walt contends that comparatively weaker states are more inclined to forge alliances with those strong states that, although they may pose a threat and are ideologically opposed, are geographically separated.[91] Although ideologically opposed to the U.S., the Saudis were hardly concerned with U.S. imperialist designs as long as an ocean separated them. The Saudis were concerned with the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet Union whose proximity to the kingdom added to its potential as a threat to Saudi sovereignty. Besides, the Saudis abhorred Soviet

---

[90] In his book *The Origins of Alliances,* Stephen Walt makes the point that states that are ideologically opposed are less likely to form alliances because they are "viewed with suspicion" and "intervening in the internal affairs of other countries will be more tempting when one believes that domestic characteristics exert a strong impact on a state's international behavior." (pg 37) This is particularly relevant in the modern day U.S.-Saudi Arabia relationship and how U.S. reaction to Soviet abuses of human rights or the U.S. relationship with Israel draws criticism from within and subjects the relationship to criticism that could alter the nature of the alliance without regard for why it was formed in the first place. For more, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 321.

[91] Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 23 and 33-40.

godlessness more than U.S. liberal secularism. Meanwhile, in the midst of McCarthyism and the 'Red Scare,' the United States and its allies in Europe could ill afford a situation in which its foreign policy toward the Soviet Union was weakened by its dependence on foreign oil.

In 1957, President Eisenhower adopted a new foreign policy vis-à-vis whereby the U.S. would intercede if it became apparent that the Soviets threatened the sovereignty of the region.[92] Furthermore, the U.S. would engage in economic and military cooperation with the Middle East states; as such, Washington injected millions of dollars to pro-Western Arab states in order to increase their security and welfare and to ensure they would remain faithful to their customers in the West. It is undeniable that Washington adopted this policy in order to deny Moscow access to the resource rich environment. However, although the Middle East still ranked second to the United States in oil production, the West was growing increasingly dependent on the flow of oil from the region and could ill afford a Soviet incursion. The policy then, reflected a change in the dynamic between Washington and Riyadh. Because the Soviets could have filled the void left by the U.S., the region's-in particular Tehran as the regional hegemon—dependency on the U.S. for security was not as important as the West's growing dependency on oil from the region. Consequently, the political advantage long enjoyed by the United States tipped in favor of Saudi Arabia and warned of the changing nature of the relationship.

The U.S.-Saudi paradigm witnessed a shift in power as the kingdom's function in U.S. foreign policy became more vital to its success. Whereas just twenty years before the Saudis were absolutely dependant on the U.S. for its growth and development, now, not only was the U.S. increasingly dependent on foreign oil, but it relied on the Saudis to be the bulwark of its anti-Communist policy in the Middle East. With the Eisenhower Doctrine, the U.S. cemented its commitment to the Middle East, in particular the pro-West Arab states, and although it was the guarantor of Saudi Arabia's sovereignty, the

---

[92] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The Eisenhower Doctrine on the Middle East, A Message to Congress, January 5, 1957," The Department of State Bulletin, XXXV1, No. 917 (January 21, 1957), 83-87., <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1957eisenhowerdoctrine.html> (March 13, 2008).

U.S. was sliding into a position of political weakness vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia; a position that was fully demonstrated during the Arab-Israeli crisis of 1973.

3. The "Oil Weapon"

The U.S.-Saudi alliance is primarily based in Saudi Arabia's position as the world's leading exporter of oil and America's position as the world's largest consumer of the same.[93] As the largest contributor to the world's oil reserves, Saudi Arabia is able to increase the supply and thus lower the price of oil. Subsequently, the United States has often appealed to the Saudis to keep prices low. The economic arrangement can be directly credited with growing the Saudis' great wealth while enabling the United States to withstand the Soviet threat and succeed as the sole remaining superpower. While this formula served America well during the Cold War, critics argue that the United States is now in a position of dependency and that, in order to maintain its superpower status, policy makers are obliged to ignore ideological differences that would otherwise terminate the alliance. In *Origin of Alliances,* Walt identifies this phenomenon as the "monopoly supply of an important asset." He states that "the more valuable the asset offered…the more effective the asset will be as an instrument of alliance formation."[94] There was a time when demand for foreign oil was far less and thus, the U.S. obtained the economic and political advantage over the Saudis. However, America's growing dependence on foreign oil and the Saudi's influence on price gave Riyadh an advantage over Washington. The precarious nature of the U.S.-Saudi relationship revealed itself in 1973, when the Saudi regime employed the oil weapon in a demonstration of its rising power and influence.[95]

The embargo's purpose was to place pressure on the West for its unwavering support of Israel, the benchmark of Washington's foreign policy in the Middle East. The

---

[93] United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *The USSR and the Arab Oil Weapon* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, December 7, 1973), <http://www.foia.cia.gov> (December 29 2007).

[94] Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 43.

[95] The embargo was a show of support from the OPEC nations for Egypt and Syria and began shortly before their conflict with Israel. The embargo was intended to influence those nations that supported Israel and demonstrate the power they held over the global economy.

willingness of the Saudis to take action that directly targeted Washington demonstrated that it no longer conducted its foreign policy from a position of inferiority. Although, Israel managed to turn the tide of war which quickly resulted in the declaration of a ceasefire, the crisis that followed demonstrated a critical vulnerability in the Western alliance and a reduction of Washington's influence in the Middle East. Most importantly for the Saudis though, the embargo further enhanced Saudi Arabia's influence in the geo-strategic realm and brought them closer to a position of political equity in the U.S.-Saudi alliance irrespective of the Cold War.

Nevertheless, the oil crisis had a tremendous impact on the Cold War and Washington's reaction was closely monitored by the Soviets. The Soviets viewed the embargo as an opportunity to gain influence in the Middle East not for the sake of oil but rather to lessen American influence so close to its borders.[96] Because the leading OPEC nations, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, were conservative anti-communist governments—a fact which partially explains their loyalty to the west as the lesser of two evils—Moscow sought any means to establish credibility amongst the Arab nations. Moscow also saw an opportunity to exacerbate the Arab-Israeli conflict and damage, if not destroy, U.S. hegemony in the Middle East. Ironically, Soviet intercession actually strengthened U.S.-Saudi ties by making them strategic partners. However, it did shift Washington's approach toward the Middle East and ignited an otherwise dormant enmity between Iran and Saudi Arabia

4. Cold War Consequences of the Oil Crisis

As a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Moscow increased its commitment to the region, particularly to those states that, in the wake of World War II, were still undergoing anti-imperialist and nationalist change at the expanse of Western influence. Moscow sought revolutionary regimes that could be influenced by Soviet military and economic aid. As such, Egypt was first provided aid in 1955 followed by Syria, Iraq,

---

[96] Because the Soviets had their own oil reserves and ranked among the world's leaders in oil production, the OPEC decision to cut production did not affect the availability of oil in the Soviet bloc. In fact, the Soviets benefitted from the price increase and a rise in exports sent to Eastern European countries that had been partially supplied by OPEC.

Morocco, Yemen, as well as Iran which favored the West but engaged Moscow in order to foster its own ambitions in the Gulf in spite of Moscow's support of its Arab clients.[97] Moscow's support maintained pressure against conservative, pro-Western states like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and certainly detracted from Western influence in the region. However, in the 1973 conflict, Moscow was reluctant to contribute in a direct manner because it realized that full support for the Arab cause could develop into a major international crisis and Moscow did not want to "adversely affect U.S.-Soviet détente."[98]

Nevertheless, Moscow's continued support of revolutionary regimes demonstrated a commitment to the active destabilization of the region, and contributed to closer ties between Washington and conservative states, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Conservative states like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, were immune to Soviet influences because its philosophy and style of government was fundamentally contrarian to their own. Thus, the more Moscow attempted to gain influence in the region, the more Saudi Arabia and Kuwait aligned with the United States.[99]

---

[97] United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *National Intelligence Estimate: The Soviet Role in the Arab World* (Washington D.C.: April 24, 1963), <http://www.foia.cia.gov > (December 29, 2007). The relationship between Iran-USSR and its implications for Middle East policies will be discussed in greater detail in another chapter.

[98] Quote from United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *The USSR and the Arab Oil Weapon.*The conflict was costly to Egypt and Syria which lost upwards of a billion dollars in aircraft, tanks, ships and various other weapon systems. However, despite Moscow's continued active support of anti-Western Arab regimes, which included the replacement of lost equipment to pre-war levels, no communist regimes were ever established in the region. Because the regimes' focus after WWII was freedom of foreign control and a return to Arab power and greatness, the anti-communist sentiment was just as strong and vocal as those opposed to Western involvement. See United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *Soviet Military Resupply Activities in the Middle East,* (Washington, D.C.: 1973), <http://www.foia.cia.gov> (December 29, 2007). In the post-WWII, Middle East, the United States was viewed deferentially from its Western allies because Middle East countries believed that the U.S. did not have the same imperialist notions demonstrated by the British and French.

[99] Muslim enmity for Moscow reached a tipping point in 1979 when, at the request of the pro-communist Afghan regime, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in order to quell an Islamic Mujahideen insurgency. The rebellion attracted Muslim fighters from throughout the Arab world (most famously, of course, was Osama bin Laden) and came to symbolize the Islamic struggle over imperialist powers. Saudi Arabia provided the rebels with financial support and actively recruited jihadists for the effort. Meanwhile, the United States, as with most anti-communist movements, authorized covert operations credited with ensnaring Moscow into its version of the Vietnam War; that is, a quagmire that would exhaust already limited Soviet resources against an insuperable enemy. The decade long war in Afghanistan eventually contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union, a point that Jihadists proudly, but wrongly, assume credit for themselves. Nonetheless, the invasion, coupled with an anti-Western revolution in Iran and subsequent Iran-Iraq War, exposed Saudi Arabia's relative insecurity and deemed it necessary that Riyadh ally with the United States in order to ensure the defense of the kingdom as well as protect the production and distribution of the world's oil supply.

After the 1973 oil crisis, Riyadh maintained a public appearance of independence in order to disassociate itself from Washington and its support of Israel. Arab-Israeli tensions ensured that as long as the United States promoted its support of Israel, a U.S.-Saudi alliance would invoke hostility from its Muslim neighbors. Throughout the 1970s, many Middle East states were susceptible to revolutionary, anti-West movements which, in turn, made Saudi Arabia vulnerable to opportunists that sought to exploit the oil-rich, but still militarily weak state. The invasion of Afghanistan only contributed to Riyadh's heightened concern. Thus, despite the earlier confrontation, Saudi Arabia was dependant on the United States as the guarantor of its security.

Because they were trusted allies, the Saudis earned favored status in the acquisition of U.S.-made military technology and training. As such, the appearance of a militarily strong Saudi Arabia served Washington's interests in the region but also helped propel the kingdom into hegemon status within the Middle East. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia became a target of those states in the region that sought to balance against it. Iran, in particular, has a history of animosity toward the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula which dates to the Sassanid and Caliphate Empires' struggle for regional dominance and exists today as the two countries represent a balance of power in the Middle East. As a result, the Middle East is primarily split along sectarian lines in which Saudi Arabia and Iran serve as the regional hegemons. However, within the context of the Cold War, while Saudi Arabia was predominantly concerned by the threat posed by Iran (as well as Iraq), the primary U.S. concern was not that Saudi Arabia maintain a balance of power against its neighbors, but rather that it remain a trusted and stable ally in the strategically critical Middle East region while continuing to guarantee the flow of oil at a reasonable price. Nevertheless, U.S. foreign policy-makers were hardly ambivalent of the differences between Sunni Arabs and Shi'a Persians and the threat of sectarian violence. Thus, despite close relations with Saudi Arabia, the U.S. also established parallel relations with Iran in what was known as the policy of the 'Twin Pillars.'

B.   TWIN PILLARS TO IRAQI FREEDOM

The Twin Pillars policy "relied on Iran and Saudi Arabia to serve as the two key protectors of the U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf."[100] The U.S. provided military and economic support to the competing hegemons with the idea that the balance of power would promote stability throughout the region. The expectant calm was intended to create an environment that was dependent upon the U.S. and would deny the Soviet Union the opportunity to influence the region. Because the U.S. and Saudi Arabia enjoyed a long history of diplomatic relations and the majority of the Middle East followed Sunni Muslim doctrine, Iran was the variable and required greater attention from the U.S., a situation which would eventually add turmoil to the region and will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

For its part, Saudi Arabia's regional hegemony is derived from its economic and religious prowess; its status as a pillar in U.S. foreign policy provided the security it needed to extend its regional dominance. Because the Western economy and international trade—from which the U.S. draws its strength—is fueled predominantly by Saudi oil, subsequent to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Saudis established themselves as a vital

---

[100] Teicher and Teicher, 29.

component of United States' hegemony. The presence of the majority of the world's oil reserves is critical to its regional economic superiority yet Saudi Arabia derived its hegemon status from its religious authority.[101]

As such, Saudi Arabia's relationship with the U.S. has cultivated a significant undercurrent of dissenters who seek the removal of the Saudi regime. However, despite the scrutiny of the world's Muslim population, the al Saud family has managed to maintain its position through the coercion, manipulation, and the co-optation of their subjects and is strengthened by the guile and authority of the clergy that espouse a strict Wahhabi doctrine. Furthermore, for Westerners, the al Saud family, as patriarchs of the Sunni Muslim faith, represents the Sunni population not just in the region but throughout the world.

Unlike Iran, which for many years served as a U.S. proxy in the region, Saudi Arabia's position amongst the Arab community made it a reluctant partner. Particularly detrimental to Washington's influence in Riyadh was, and still is, the U.S. relationship with Israel. Iran, however, has a significant Jewish population and, pre-Khomeni Iran held no public animosity toward the Zionist state. Nevertheless, the Arab-Israeli divide was exacerbated by Saudi Islamists who sought the destruction of Israel and provided financial support to anti-Israeli causes. Indeed, Riyadh's decision to employ the oil weapon during the 1973 conflict was an appeal to the Islamists who threatened the

---

[101] Home to Mecca, the Saudis are responsible to over a billion Muslims who expect the kingdom to maintain the sanctity and security of Islam's most holy site. As such, the Saudis have used their oil wealth to improve upon the site and make the conditions more bearable to Muslims obligated to perform the *hajj*. In the past, the *hajj* was the scene of mass deaths due to deplorable conditions along the caravan routes which contributed to exhaustion and dehydration, tent fires and stampedes, and acts of terrorism. Today, it is estimated that over two million Muslims make the trek annually and, as guests of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they are treated with air conditioned tents (or nearby hotels for those who can afford it), bottled water, medical care, and a robust security plan designed to ensure the safe passage and to prevent would-be terrorists the use of the *hajj* as a political statement.

The most famous of which occurred in 1979 when anti-Western Islamic Fundamentalist took siege of the holy site and held several hundred hostages. Listed among his demands were the expulsion of all foreigners from the peninsula and the cutoff of oil exports to the United States. The site was retaken but the anti-U.S. sentiment carried over to other Muslim countries where demonstrations were held in Bangladesh, India, Kuwait, the UAE, and Pakistan. In more violent protests, mobs also attacked U.S. embassies in Pakistan and Libya. Along with the Islamic revolution in Iran, 1979 was a watershed year for the Islamist movement and the region. Decidedly pro-West during much of the Cold War and in the fight against Communism, the region suddenly began to display an overt anti-U.S. sentiment that, once the Soviet Union crumbled, became the main issue confronting U.S. policy makers.

legitimacy of the al-Saud rule. That the embargo came at the expense of the United States should have resulted in strict repercussions against the Arab state. However, because of America's dependency on oil, policy makers could not look objectively at the relationship and "representatives of the State and Defense Departments regularly testified that Riyadh was a strong and reliable partner that could be counted upon to support the United States in the region."[102]

The accounting is accurate if one considers that Riyadh continued to provide Washington tacit support in matters that did not include Israel but certainly when it served the Saudis' interests. An unstable Middle East was just as much a threat to the al-Saud regime as it was to Israel and, by extension, the United States. Thus, Saudi Arabia's wealth was quietly used to enact the policies of the United States in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's hegemony was a product of its ability to buy influence and protection from its neighbors at the behest of the United States. Unfortunately, Saudi influence extended mainly to its Sunni neighbors and was impotent in dealing with Iran and Iraq.

As stated earlier, Pahlavi-led Iran was a loyal U.S. partner in the fight against communism and, until 1979, was considered an "island of stability" in an otherwise unstable region.[103] Iraq, however, was a constant threat to peace in the region as it endured several violent regime changes since it declared its independence in 1932. To make matters more difficult, whereas the populations of Iran and Saudi Arabia are largely Shi'a and Sunni respectively, Iraq's population consisted of both Sunni and Shi'a, and included a large Kurdish population in the north. It was as though Iraq was preordained to serve as the battlefield in which all Muslim sectarian differences would be settled. Sectarian disputes prevented Iraq from being a country of any real power despite significant oil deposits. Rather, Iraq's main purpose within the region was to serve as a buffer between the regional hegemons, Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, in 1980, fueled

---

[102] Teicher and Teicher, 29.

[103] Quoted in James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 233.

by a history of border disputes over rights to the waterway that separated the countries and amid concerns that Khomeni would attempt to exert influence within its borders, Iraq invaded Iran.

The affects of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War contributed to Washington's initial anxiety over the Iran-Iraq War.[104] Washington's primary concern was how the war would affect the oil market; thus, it was imperative that the war remain contained and not affect the neighboring countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. Despite its neutrality during the war, Saudi Arabia was understandably concerned with the outcome because, historically, both Iraq and Iran posed threats to the Kingdom. Riyadh long suspected Baghdad of supporting hostile anti-Saud political movements that threatened Saudi Arabia's influence in the region; and the recent Islamic Revolution in Iran inspired Shi'a riots within Saudi Arabia and was a potential threat to the al-Saud's religious legitimacy.

After the 1973 crisis, Washington determined that a militarily strong Saudi Arabia served U.S. interests in the area. Thus, Washington began a policy of providing Saudi Arabia with advanced military technology and training which made the Kingdom the second (Israel being the first) most heavily armed state in the region. By 1980, Saudi Arabia theoretically possessed the tools needed for a defensive stand against Egypt, Iraq, Iran and even Israel, all states it considered a potentially hostile threat. Nevertheless, Iraq's invasion of Iran upset the status quo and gave the kingdom cause for concern particularly because of Saddam Hussein's expansionist behavior. Additionally, the threat of Iran emerging victorious against Iraq and continuing its momentum toward the Arabian Peninsula was not a risk Washington was willing to accept. Washington maintained neutrality early in the conflict but in 1982, a successful Iranian counteroffensive forced the U.S. to choose sides. Although Saddam Hussein was a wild card and a constant threat to Israel, the events fueled by Islamic fundamentalist fervor and anti-U.S. sentiment proved Iran was a greater threat to Saudi Arabia and by extension the Unites States. Thus, Washington began its tacit support of Iraq.

---

[104] Certainly Washington speculated how the war would play out politically and its potential affect on the détente between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, mainly because the Muslim countries exhibited disdain for the godless communists, Washington was only marginally concerned with increased Soviet influence in the region as a result of the war.

Far from settling the regional disputes, the period marked by the Iran-Iraq War witnessed a clear shift in the balance of power in the Middle East which previously teetered slightly in favor of the Saudis. Washington's reaction to the termination of diplomatic relations with Tehran was stronger relations with Riyadh which, aside from Israel, became the principle recipient of American weaponry. Additionally, because the U.S. threw its support behind a Sunni-led Iraq regime, the "Twin Pillars" policy that relied on the bipolar existence of Sunni and Shi'a hegemons equally supported by the U.S. became a one dimensional policy weighted heavily in favor of the Sunni regimes. Despite the lack of support from a superpower, Iran's influence in the region gained strength amongst the other Shi'a regimes and those that benefitted from the anti-Israel, anti-Sunni, and anti-U.S. rhetoric espoused by the Islamists. Iran thus prepared itself to become the single greatest threat to Saudi Arabia and U.S. influence in the region; in the interim, however, Iraq filled that role and further cemented Washington's position in the region.

1.   Operation Desert Storm

During the eight year Iran-Iraq war which essentially ended in a stalemate, the Iraqi military doubled in strength to become among the world's largest fighting forces. In addition to the U.S. aid, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait funded Iraq in the war because they had an interest in preventing the rise of Shi'a influence in the region. However, after the cessation of hostilities, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were reluctant to forgive that debt despite Iraq's insistence that the war prevented Persian influence in the Arabian Peninsula. In attempt to force the issue, Iraq complained to the United States that Kuwait was slant drilling into its territory. Iraq argued that the illegal drilling contributed to Iraq's inability to pay its war debts to not only its Arab neighbors but also to Washington who, in addition to the aid given to fight the war, gave significant monies to Iraq in order to prevent Saddam from turning to the Soviets. Given no other alternative and faced with a looming economic crisis, Saddam Hussein ordered his army into Kuwait. Kuwait fell quickly and with the bulk of the Iraqi army on its northern border, Riyadh feared that Saudi Arabia was Saddam's next target.

49

Publically, the operation was labeled as a war of Kuwaiti liberation against Iraqi aggression, and the world was morally obligated to preserve the sovereignty of a weaker nation against an evil foe. However, realists contend that Iraq posed a real and significant threat to the world's largest oil reserves and an Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia would certainly wreck havoc on the global economy that, on the heels of the Soviet collapse, was expanding at breakneck pace. For years the Saudis purchased the best in military technology and training from Washington, yet, despite the wealth of small arms, modern aircraft and tanks, and advanced air defense systems, Riyadh felt its military was ill-prepared to challenge the battle hardened Iraqi army. Riyadh appealed to Washington for help and, in August 1990, the U.S. mobilized its forces.

Realism theory supports Saddam Hussein's offensive behavior in that, in its weakened state, Iraq's only recourse for maintaining its security and sovereignty was to demonstrate a threat, real or imagined, against potential adversaries. Unfortunately, and as balance of power theory suggests, the unintended consequences of Saddam's defensive acts were an increase in the offensive capabilities of the states that Saddam posed a threat against. Israel (which had been the recipient of errant Iraqi Scud missiles during the war), Iran, and Saudi Arabia were particularly concerned with Saddam's intimations and thus inclined to increase their defensive posture. Iran, as will be discussed later, made investments into nuclear technology and forged relationships with enemies of the U.S.; and Saudi Arabia, once again, leaned heavily on Washington even at the risk of creating dissent amongst the Arab-Muslim world.

2.   Common Enemies

The U.S.-Saudi relationship, forged out of *Realpolitik* and the bulwark of U.S. policy in the Arab world, has evolved into a dangerous arrangement that threatens both states' internal security as the continued ignorance of ideological considerations opened the door to an enemy dedicated to their destruction. Hardliners such as Osama bin Laden who seek the destruction of the U.S. for its support of Israel also hold the Saudi rulers in contempt and consider the regime the "near enemy" in its jihad against the pro-Western

regime. The violent nature of these extremists has resulted in internal threats against the Saudi regime, audacious assaults against the U.S. military, and of course the tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001.

Despite no indication that the Saudi regime itself is responsible for the support of terrorism, critics argue that Saudi Arabia's foreign and domestic policies created an environment that fostered violence from Islamic fundamentalist groups and targeted the United States as well as the Saudi regime as the subject of their condemnation. Publically, the Saudi regime made overt demonstrations that would seem to be an effort to distance itself from the United States in order to recapture credibility amongst the Arab world, particularly those that criticize the regime. At the Arab League summit meeting of March 2007, King Abdullah denounced the American involvement in Iraq by calling it "illegal."[105]

At a time when the United States faced global criticism for the perceived failures in Iraq, this was an unexpected and unprovoked attack from its most important and most trusted ally in the region. Four months later, Washington announced that it had prepared a package in which $20billion in advanced weaponry would be delivered to Saudi Arabia and its neighbors. This in itself is not extraordinary; as a key ally during the Cold War, the United States has a long history of providing Saudi Arabia with weapons. However, the timing of this announcement, so soon after his earlier condemnation of the United States, rendered King Abdullah's comments transparent as simply an attempt to gain favor from the regional leaders, and pacify not just the *ulama*, the foundation of the regime's religious legitimacy, but also the fundamentalists who held the Saudi regime in contempt for its relationship with Washington.

Nevertheless, as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah must preserve Saudi Arabia's position as the hegemon in the Arab world. In doing so, he recognizes that the source of his power is, in large part, based on the relationship with the United States and not from the people of Saudi Arabia who, by and large, reject the royal family. As such, the Saudi regime is compelled not to distance itself too far from the

---

[105] Fattah, *Saudi King Condemns U.S. Occupation of Iraq.*

United States, but rather use the relationship and the strength of the its military to strengthen Saudi Arabia's position relative to any threats, real or perceived, as well as internal or external. Because, even as the Saudi government is the continued target of violence that could be a precursor to revolution, Iran still looms large as the most imminent threat to the sovereignty of the Sunni state. The arms deal then was a "plan to bolster the militaries of the Persian Gulf countries…to contain the growing power of Iran in the region and to demonstrate that, no matter what happens in Iraq, Washington remains committed to its longtime Arab allies."[106]

For its part, Riyadh distinguished itself from its Persian regional rival by giving the appearance that Saudi Arabia is a country on the throes of modernity and prepared to conform to the rules and norms of globalization. Saudi Arabia recently ascended into the World Trade Organization and, unlike Tehran, which continues to provide support to Hamas and Hezbollah, Riyadh has denounced the use of violence by Islamic fundamentalist groups.[107] Additionally, although Saudi clerics espouse an Islamic fundamentalist religion, all evidence indicates that the regime is far removed from the extremist nature of those state and sub-state actors that support the use of terrorism and are enemies of the U.S. Nevertheless, the perverse nature of the relationship has opened Washington and Riyadh to harsh, and seemingly just, criticism overshadowed only by other events that mar the region. When the U.S. invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam, the failure to provide immediate stability set the stage for a resurgent Iran to capitalize on the imbroglio, exert influence in the failed state, and achieve a greater slice of the Middle East at the expense of Saudi hegemony.

C.   SUMMARY

Saudi Arabia's rise to such a formidable position within the Middle East and the world is very much a product of its alliance with the United States and its adherence to

---

106 Cloud, *U.S. Set to Offer Huge Arms Deal to Saudi Arabia.*

107 The World Trade Organization is an international organization chartered to liberalize trade between states. Its website states that it is a "negotiating forum" with "a set of rules" that "helps to settle disputes…;" not exactly the tenets of Islamic Fundamentalist organizations. For more see "*What is the World Trade Organization?*"

the tenets of defensive realism. That is not to say that without the United States, Saudi Arabia would still be a barren wasteland of nomads; certainly its oil wealth attracted a number of suitors willing to serve as a sponsor to the Arab nation. However, the relative strength of the United States and its distant location appealed to the Saudis who were acting defensively to protect their wealth against foreign threats. Additionally, early on the Saudis existed in a position of inferiority and were dependent upon the U.S. alliance for economic aid as well as security. However, as demonstrated by the oil crisis of 1973, Saudi Arabia possesses its own source of strength. Riyadh has employed Walt's idea of the "monopoly supply of an important asset" to develop itself into a regional hegemon to which Washington is committed.[108] The imbroglio in Iraq, however, is the tipping point, and as Iran marches closer toward its nuclear ambition, the nature of the U.S.-Saudi alliance will be tested far beyond what it has yet endured.

---

[108] Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 43.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

IV.   IRAN

Iran and the United States have been engaged in a proxy war for nearly thirty years and the current crisis in Iraq coupled with Tehran's quest to achieve nuclear power have only amplified the tension between the once and would-be allies. During the Cold War, Iran was a valuable and close political U.S. ally, however, beginning with the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Tehran adopted an Islamic fundamentalist philosophy and "set a policy direction intended to challenge U.S. influence…in the region."[109] Subsequent to the revolution and the hostage crisis, Washington severed all diplomatic relations. Tensions reached a boiling point when President Bush rebuked Iran for its support of international terrorism and included Iran in the infamous 'Axis of Evil' speech. Indeed, the U.S. State Department considers Iran "the most active state sponsor of terrorism" and is primary financier to Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as other organizations whose goals are the destruction of Israel and the elimination of U.S. hegemony.[110] Ironically, despite the regime's Islamic fundamentalist intimations, the population of Iran is rather pro-Western in its ideology; Iran is one of the few states in the region to have a democratically elected government. In fact, of all the states in the region, Iran's secular, liberal population shares more in common with the United States than any other state in the region including those the U.S. considers its allies. However, Washington's continued support of Riyadh affects the regional balance of power and comes at the expense of Tehran. Thus, current tensions between the U.S.-Saudi alliance and Iran have reached an impasse and promise to get worse as long as the two sides refuse to engage in diplomatic discussions. This chapter will review the policies and events that shaped Iran's recent history as it involved the United States in order to develop a clearer understanding of the current imbroglio and its likely outcome as it relates to the regional balance of power.

---

[109] Kenneth Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses.* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, December 28, 2007).

[110] United States, State Department, "Country Reports on Terrorism," (Washington D.C.: Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism 28 April 2006) <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2005/64337.htm> (February 18, 2008).

A. THE U.S.-IRAN ALLIANCE IS BORN

In sharp contrast to the United States and Saudi Arabia, two countries whose relevance is in its relative infancy, Iran's historical lineage, beginning with the Persian Empire through the Safavid Dynasty, is rich and prodigious. Indeed, Persia was a global imperial power until the nineteenth century when it succumbed to the European powers that colonized and exploited the region.[111] Washington's interest in Iran began as a commercial endeavor in the mid nineteenth century but quickly evolved as Iran sought a return to power. Devastated by the political and economic ruin caused by Russian and European subjugation, Iran called on the United States to reorganize the government's finances and help the failing empire embrace the norms of modernity.[112] Iran trusted the United States because Washington as yet maintained a political isolationist policy toward Europe and Asia, and distance provided protection from American colonial or imperial inclinations. The United States was immersed in a period of rampant growth and a population explosion that required an influx of resources. Thus, Washington's interest in Iran was, like all other foreign powers, centered on oil.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the United States and Iran were headed in opposite directions on the empirical ladder. The technological development and modernity that propelled the West into global dominance evaded the Middle East and by the turn of the century, the Persian Empire reached the nadir of its decline. While the United States' hegemony was on the rise, Iran had not yet captured the value of its oil reserves which would be critical to Persia's rise to prominence in the second half of the century. Nevertheless, up until 1952, relations between the United States and Iran were positive and seemingly on equitable terms. Tehran solicited and received valuable economic and developmental assistance from Washington which, in return, received oil concessions and secured a regional strategic partner. As the need for oil became critical

---

[111] Iran and Persia will be used interchangeably throughout the essay. Officially, "Iran" is used in the political context while "Persia" is used in a historical or cultural context.

[112] Tehran looked to the United States because it was "unblemished by the foreign manipulations of the last one hundred years and…could be trusted to be sympathetic to the Iranian cause as a consequence of her own historical experiences." Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 19-20.

to the United States' relevance as a global power, any perceived threat or Soviet expansion in the Middle East was a matter of national security. Thus, newly-elected President Eisenhower considered intervention in an unstable Iran a compulsory component of his Cold War doctrine.

B.   FROM THE COUP TO THE TWIN PILLARS

In 1951, newly appointed Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in order to rid the nation of all forms of foreign involvement. Long time sponsor, Great Britain responded by enacting economic sanctions against Iran and the loss of patronage plunged Iran into an economic crisis. The British believed that blame for the crisis would fall on Mossadeq and the Shah would be forced to remove him from power. To the contrary, Mossadeq never fell out of favor with the Iranian people and his stance against the British earned the Prime Minister hero status among Persians as well as Americans who were delighted with the historic similarity to the U.S. and the revolutionary connotation of challenging British rule. His popularity achieved cult status when he was named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year. Subsequently, President Truman voiced his support of the nationalization of the AIOC and invited Mossadeq to the White House. Despite protests from London, Truman was most concerned by instability in the oil markets and had no intention of undermining Mossadeq and challenging Iran's sovereignty. However, Mossadeq's policies and increased popularity was a threat to the Shah, contributed to instability within Iran, and later forced Washington to intervene.[113]

---

[113] Nationalization of the oil company was the first step in Mossadeq's policies that sought to restrict the power of the monarchy and put more into the hands of the people. In a move that appeared to assuage the concerns of the London, Washington, and the Shah, Mossadeq resigned reportedly in a dispute over the allocation of constitutional powers. The Shah chose Ahmad Qavam to replace the popular Mossadeq. Perhaps not the best choice, Qavam was responsible for granting concessions to the Soviets that led to Soviet occupation of Iranian territory. His previous policies ran directly counter to the nationalist Mossadeq and, immediately upon taking office, Qavam—somewhat predictably—announced that relations with the British would be resumed sparking widespread protests across the country. The Shah was forced to dismiss Qavam and re-appoint Mossadeq as Prime Minister.

1. Operation Ajax

Although Washington maintained that it would not undermine Mossadeq's government, overtly or covertly, a program was initiated during the Truman administration and continued under Eisenhower ostensibly designed to "weaken the Soviet position in Iran."[114] Over time, however, the program became more aggressive and, despite public admission to the contrary, was used to weaken Mossadeq's National Front party by targeting figures loyal to Mossadeq. Whether it was a result of the CIA's activities or the British, who were actively engaged in similar efforts, several leaders of the National Front soon turned against Mossadeq. Convinced of British perfidy, Mossadeq severed ties thus ending the era of British domination in Iran. Reeling from the loss of control of the Iranian oil industry, London convinced Washington that Mossadeq's policies were driving Iran toward communism. This information triggered an interventionist response from President Eisenhower who agreed to participate in overthrowing the government of Iran.[115]

The coup was a watershed event and, for most Americans and Iranians, marked the beginning of U.S.-Iranian relations. It is the first time the United States, under the Eisenhower Doctrine, proactively pursued actions intended to thwart perceived communist intrusion in the Middle East and underscored the United States' recognition

---

[114] The CIA-led program began as a "propaganda and political action program run through a network headed by two Iranians" and targeted the Soviet Union and the pro-communist Tudeh party." Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup D'Etat in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987), 268. For more detail on the CIA's program in Iran, see Ray S. Cline, *The CIA Under Reagan, Bush & Casey: The Evolution of the Agency from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1981), 119-126.

[115] By alienating the British, the longtime U.S. ally, Mossadeq forced Washington's hand and soon after, senior CIA and MI6 officials collaborated on a plan to overthrow the popular nationalist leader. However, the success of the coup was dependant on the Shah's ability to elicit the help of military forces and rally support against the popular Mossadeq. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi represented the dichotomy of Persian attitudes toward the West. On one hand, Persians were disappointed with their government for kowtowing to Western norms and sought a return to prominence free of foreign intervention. On the other hand, they recognized that without the West—particularly, the United States—Iran would not be able to rise above its socio-economic condition. Thus, Pahlavi just like his father, Reza Khan, had a history of working with the United States and continued his father's quest for modernization with assistance from Washington. When it was determined that Mossadeq was a threat to U.S.-Iranian relations, Pahlavi believed he had no choice but to support the coup and oust the popular nationalist prime minister. For a more thorough account of the coup, see Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, 2008 ed. (Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

that the region was critical to its national interests. Although Saudi Arabia had already become a reliable regional partner, the Saudis, their Wahhabi traditions, and the regime's resistance to modernity, (duplicitous as it is) were an enigma to most Americans. In contrast, Americans could empathize with Iranians and their attempts to break free from imperialist chains. Furthermore, Iran's population was far more tolerant of other religions and, in its quest for modernity, recognized the benefits of a secular, liberal government. The perceived similarities between Iran and the United States made Iran Washington's prize in the Middle East and the bulwark of U.S. Middle East foreign policy.

2. Twin Pillars

In addition to access to Iranian oil, Washington depended on Tehran as the critical component of its 'Twin Pillars' policy in which regional balance of power was upheld by Iran and Saudi Arabia.[116] Although Saudi Arabia was a loyal ally, Washington believed that Iran was vastly closer in ideology and would prove to be a stronger ally over time. In Reza Pahlavi, Washington had a gracious ally who affirmed his gratitude to the United States for ousting Mossadeq by acting as a U.S. surrogate in the region. Iran made use of its oil revenue and upgraded its military with American made weapons. The increased wealth also gave the Shah the resources needed to expand his nascent nuclear program, every aspect of which was supported by Washington.[117] As a result, Iran grew in power; but with increased power came increased responsibility. Iran's assimilation to Western norms meant that it was expected to be held accountable and perform functions on behalf of the West. Because of its strategic position, Iran served as the guardian of the Persian Gulf and stood as the first line of defense against possible Soviet incursion into the Middle East.

With the support and encouragement of the United States, Iran's resurgence as a military power enabled the Shah to adopt a series of economic reforms intended to

---

[116] Teicher and Teicher, 29.

[117] The U.S. helped launch the nuclear program of Iran in the 1950s and continued to provide support until the 1979 Islamic Revolution that toppled the Shah. For more, see Gawdat Bahgat, "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran," *International Studies Perspectives* 7 (2006), 124-136.

develop the country into an industrial power and gain favor from the West.[118] Indeed, Iran and the Shah drew the attention of western companies which invested heavily in the Iranian economy. Unfortunately, however, the economic reforms occurred too quickly, well ahead of social and democratic reforms that would have allowed the majority of Iranians to benefit from the westernization of Iran. Rampant illiteracy and a fundamental lack of comprehension of even basic legal frameworks plagued the would-be benefactors of the reforms. Corruption was pervasive and, as a result, the reforms failed to bring the Shah the political capital he had lost by alienating the clergy and the elites.[119] The effect of the failed reforms is summarized by Ali Ansari in his book, *Confronting Iran.*

> Both groups [clergy and elites] had been essential in facilitating the coup against Mossadeq in 1953 and were vital to the domestic sustenance of the institution of the monarchy. In attacking them, the Shah was alienating the pillars of his regime with a view to replacing them with a grateful enfranchised peasantry. He grew more dependent on the United States, while America, increasingly divorced from alternatives in Iran, grew more dependent on him.[120]

In the short term, the Shah nevertheless increased his grip on power, fleeting as it was, by consolidating his authority over all aspects of the government. In private, President Carter admonished the Shah's leadership, but the absence of a viable alternative committed Washington to the relationship. Additionally, because the United States was responsible for empowering the Shah in 1953, a reversal of course would have severely damaged the superpower's regional hegemony and encouraged the Soviet Union to extend its influence into Iran. Thus, despite widespread protests and growing dissent among the Iranian clergy, in 1977, President Carter reaffirmed the relationship and

---

[118] The White Revolution was a series of nineteen reforms introduced over a period of fifteen years and were intended to bring Iran into modernity in the Western model. Among the reforms were voting rights for women, the abolishment of feudalism, the establishment of education and health care programs, etc. The reforms were promoted by Washington which believed that their economic benefits, certain to be a windfall, were secondary to the democratization of Iran that was sure to result. See Ansari 45-49.

[119] The reforms put the Shah at odds with the Shi'a clergy and landed elites whose position, power, and wealth were threatened. Land was stripped from the elites and placed into the hands of the disenfranchised and those who otherwise would have never been able to acquire property. The Shah believed that the loss of support from wealthy landowners, the traditional power brokers in Iran which included the clergy, would be balanced by the vast support he would receive from those that were indebted to the Shah for their newfound fortune. See Ansari 54-66.

[120] Ansari, 48.

credited the Shah with turning Iran into an "island of stability" in the region and said that it was certainly attributed to the "respect, admiration, and love" Iranians felt for their leader.[121] The widespread adoration claimed by President Carter was a fabrication intended to espouse support for a failed leader.

3.   Blowback

In 2000, U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright publicly acknowledged and expressed regret for Washington's involvement in the 1953 coup. Certainly forty-seven years of hindsight proved that the United States suffered considerable 'blowback' for the operation.[122] It was the first operation of its kind for the CIA and its approval was perhaps hastily provided by a new president eager to stem communist aggression before it began and it was believed that Mossadeq's leftist sympathies rendered him a liability whereas the Shah maintained a strict anti-communist position. Iran's valuable oil reserves also drove Eisenhower to make the decision he felt best served national interests as well as the post-war global economy that could only be saved by affordable fuel from a stable Middle East.

Critics argue that if not for the coup which ousted Mossadeq, "Iran would probably have continued along its path toward full democracy," and that by supporting Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the United States brought "progress toward democracy [in Iran] to a screeching halt."[123] The critique seems to justify or ignore Mossadeq's attempts to consolidate power and implies that they were less egregious in 1951 than the Shah's efforts to do the same in the 1970s. The critique also ignores the Shah's social reforms and posits that they were simply weak attempts to placate Iran's Western patrons. The reform's mismanagement should not, however, obfuscate their well-aimed intent to bring Iran into the industrialized world and raise the socio-economic condition of the Iranian population. Regardless of what revisionist history has determined the outcome of the

---

[121] Quoted in James Bill, 233.

[122] The term "blowback" was first used in a 1954 CIA document entitled, "Clandestine Service History – Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran – November 1952-August 1953." Since then, the term has come to mean the unintended consequences of covert operations.

[123] Kinzer, ix.

coup to be, that current tensions between Washington and Tehran have their roots in this event is an absolute. Nevertheless, many Americans compartmentalize the event as a necessity of the Cold War and view the history of U.S.-Iranian relations primarily through the biased prism of the 1979 Revolution and subsequent hostage crisis.

C.   THE REVOLUTION

Beginning with the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the world witnessed the rise of events from radicals encouraged by Islamic fundamentalists who, in addition to the destruction of Israel, sought to subvert or extricate foreign involvement in traditional Islamic lands, be they Arab, Persian, or Ottoman.[124] In Iran, fundamentalists blamed the country's social and economic woes on years of subjugation at the hands of the United States and considered the Shah a servant of Western materialism and godlessness. Indeed, the financial boon that occurred in Iran after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War promised nationwide economic prosperity but failed because of rampant corruption and mismanagement of which the Shah was the primary participant. By 1978, demonstrations were a common occurrence in Iran's political landscape and the Shah's inability to manage domestic issues coupled with an increasingly fervent and growing Islamism resulted in his removal from power and the ejection of U.S. influence in Iran.

Fomented by the Shah's religious opposition, the demonstrations were comprised of middle class students, who, in a reversal of course, protested the Shah's veiled liberalization policies and Westernization through self-imposed restrictions on dress and stricter adherence to Islamic law. Their participation did not necessarily indicate a desire to return to strict fundamentalist Islamic teachings but rather demonstrated their rejection of the Shah's failed social reforms and his kowtowing toward Western materialism and greed. The Shah attempted to quell the nascent uprising by offering concessions but his

---

[124] The formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 is popularly regarded as the birth of the Islamic Movement as it is understood today but the 1967 Arab-Israeli War provided global awareness.

efforts were unsuccessful and weakened his waning hold on power.[125] A few months later, the Shah left Iran and never returned. The absence of Washington's loyal surrogate opened the door for the religious clergy to exert their influence and, in February 1979, the revolution was declared victorious. Shortly thereafter, the Islamic Republic of Iran was established, and its leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, turned his attention toward the 'Great Satan.'[126]

Khomeini blamed most of Iran's ills on what he perceived as exploitation by the United States at the expense of the Iranian people. He stated that, "Our relations with the United States are the relations of the oppressed and the oppressor…the plundered and the plunderer."[127] Thus, in October, when President Carter allowed the Shah to enter the United States to receive medical treatment, Khomeini considered it yet another transgression against Iran. Fueled by anti-U.S. rhetoric and enmity for the Shah, hundreds of students scaled the wall, seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran, and ignited.

1.   The Hostage Crisis

In November 1979, students, led by a dozen or so Islamic extremists, seized the embassy and held fifty-two hostages for 444 days.[128] Masked by a pre-planned demonstration to honor protestors killed a year previously by the Shah's police, the students scaled the walls and turned what was supposed to be peaceful protest into the crisis that embarrassed the United States and emboldened Islamists the world over. Washington was no better prepared for this crisis than it was aware that Iran was preparing for revolution the previous year. President Carter first attempted diplomatic

---

[125] A historical review of conditions in Iran clearly shows that a revolution was forming. However, in August 1978, a CIA National Intelligence Estimate stated that Iran "is not in a revolutionary or even a prerevolutionary situation," which demonstrates Washington's misunderstanding of the situation and a fundamental lack of comprehension of the motivations behind the Islamic movement. Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 438.

[126] Ansari, pg 87. In *Confronting Iran,* Ali Ansari describes the origins of the term 'Great Satan.' "..in Islamic thought, Satan is temptation personified, and the U.S. personified the temptations of material culture, the excesses of which were among the great faults of Reza Pahlavi."

[127] Quoted in Oren, 545, from Seyom Brown, *The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy from Truman to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 515.

[128] The plan to seize the embassy was not conceived by Khomeini but by students of his teachings who sought the Ayatollah's approval. Ansari, 88.

means to resolve the crisis but resorted to more powerful forms of pressure through economic sanctions and boycotts of Iranian oil. However, after all diplomatic ties were severed in April 1980, the ill-fated military attempt to rescue the hostages proved to be the final embarrassment for the U.S. President. Khomeini's movement successfully "undermined the political, economic, and strategic hegemony of America in the region."[129] To Islamists, Washington's inability to resolve the matter served as evidence of Allah's will and added to their perception of American weakness.

If the point of conception for the anti-U.S. Islamist movement is the U.S.-led coup in 1953 than the crisis of 1979 was its maturation point and cemented the enmity that currently exists between Tehran and Washington.[130] The revolution also clearly delineated the balance of power in the Middle East. The pre-revolutionary period was defined by U.S. hegemony in which the Twin Pillars, Iran and Saudi Arabia, buttressed the U.S. policy of Soviet containment in the Middle East. After the revolution, Iran became the primary sponsor of those state and non-state actors who also follow a strict Islamist policy and consider their goals the return of the caliphate, the destruction of Israel, and the elimination of U.S. regional hegemony. However, it would be years before Iran would be relevant in global politics. The absence of Washington as its protector left Iran vulnerable to invasion by the Soviets—a strong possibility had the Soviets not invaded Afghanistan the previous year—or the Iraqis, which attempted to capitalize on Iran's weakness and establish itself as the dominant regional power.

D.   WAR, SCANDAL, AND TERROR

Washington responded to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by drawing a clear line in the sand and declaring that it will "use any means, including military forces" to

---

[129] In his book on the revolution and subsequent hostage crisis, Mark Bowden, calls the revolution, "the first battle in America's war against militant Islam, a conflict that would eventually engage much of the world." See Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam*, (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 69.

[130] Ibid., 5.

repel "an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region."[131] In what became known as the Carter Doctrine, the U.S. made it clear that, despite the recent revolution in Iran, it considered the Persian Gulf region within its realm of influence and would stop at nothing to prevent the Soviet Union from undermining U.S. authority. In a demonstration of U.S. bravado, even after the adverse economic effects of the 1973 oil crisis instigated by the Saudis and the humiliation of the 1979 hostage crisis owing to Khomeini, Washington still treated the Middle East states as marionettes. Accordingly, when Iraq invaded Iran, Washington, which was not predisposed to support Iran or Iraq, pulled the strings it deemed necessary to produce the results favorable to U.S. interests but with little regard for their repercussions. This arrogance resulted in a contradictory foreign policy that armed U.S. enemies, further enraged the already violently hostile fundamentalists, and contributed to the region's instability.

1. The Iran-Iraq War

In the 1970s, Soviet-backed Iraq was a growing but manageable menace in the region but still posed little threat to U.S.-backed Saudi Arabia or Iran. However, after the revolution, Iraq's dictator, Saddam Hussein, was emboldened to capitalize on Iran's vulnerability and invaded Iran in order to seize regional power forfeited by its Persian neighbors. Initially, Washington abstained from providing support because neither side was much of a friend to the U.S. However, the U.S. was concerned that an Islamic fundamentalist victory against Iraq would spill into Saudi Arabia and would further disturb the oil supply. In 1983, Washington restored diplomatic relations with Iraq and sent Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to meet with Saddam Hussein and provide whatever was necessary to avoid losing the war with Iran.

In addition to selling weapons to Iraq, the U.S. increased its naval patrols of the Persian Gulf, ostensibly to protect the shipping routes on which the bulk of the world's

---

[131] The exact text reads, "Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." For more, see the full speech, Jimmy Carter, *1980 State of the Union Address* (Washington D.C.: January 23, 1980) <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml> (March 6, 2008).

oil supply traveled. However, the presence of the U.S. Navy imbued Saddam with confidence as he initiated the bitter 'Tanker War' in which oil tankers and merchant ships from both Iran and Iraq, as well as those from neutral countries, were attacked. Subsequently, both the U.S. and Soviet Union deemed it necessary to involve themselves in order to protect the supply of oil. The Soviet Union chartered tankers and the United States reflagged ships knowing that an attack on a U.S. flagged ship amounted to an attack on the U.S. itself and the U.S., under international law, was allowed to respond militarily. The apparent cooperation between the U.S. and Soviet Union demonstrated their recognition that a stable Middle East superseded their animosities toward one another. The apparent détente may have been a contradiction in foreign policy but it reflected Washington's realist tendencies later demonstrated by the Iran-Contra Affair. Throughout the conflict, the Soviet Union provided arms to both Iran and Iraq in an effort to hedge its bets on the outcome, a practice the U.S. would employ with disastrous results.

2.   Iran-Contra

As mentioned before, the U.S. originally maintained a policy of neutrality between Iran and Iraq; Secretary of State Kissinger even intimated that it was unfortunate that they could not both lose.[132] Thus, it should be no surprise that a few months after announcing its support for Iraq, agents of the United States initiated a covert program which sold weapons to Iran, a sworn enemy of the state, and illegally used the money to fund a group of rebels, the contras, in South America.[133] President Reagan publically proclaimed that the intentions were noble and that it was necessary to renew relations with Iran because "without Iran's cooperation, [the U.S.] cannot bring an end to the Persian Gulf War; without Iran's concurrence, there can be no enduring peace in the

---

[132] Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 18.

[133] When word of the program broke, President Reagan defended the initiative stating that it was "undertaken for the simplest and best of reasons: to renew a relationship with the nation of Iran, to bring an honorable end to the bloody 6-year war between Iran and Iraq, to eliminate state-sponsored terrorism and subversion, and to effect the safe return of all hostages [in Lebanon]."For more, see *Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy,* 1986, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/111386c.htm> (March 6, 2008).

Middle East."[134] However, the affair stood as a reminder of Washington's realist tendencies and its desire to affect the outcome of the war in order to generate a favorable outcome for the U.S., despite potentially adverse repercussions. In this case, those in Washington believed that the U.S. would achieve greater benefit from a prolonged conflict in which both Iran and Iraq depleted their military capability. Consequently, the U.S. provided weapons to a Soviet backed nationalist Arab in Saddam as well as the radical Islamist Khomeini.

3.   Rise to Terror

For its part, Iran was eager to accept weapons from the United States because the conflict with Iraq severely depleted its military capacity to wage war. Iran had also become a pariah among the Gulf countries which considered it the greatest threat to stability in the region and were therefore balancing against it. Nevertheless, Washington's willingness to engage in matters of such political and military importance with Tehran—even covertly—so soon after the revolution "reinforced the belief among Iranians that the United States was duplicitous and hypocritical."[135] Particularly damning was Washington's tacit support of the corrupt Saudi regime as well as the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in their fight against the Soviets even while it condemned Islamist groups in the Levant. Despite President Reagan's efforts to renew the relationship between the US and Iran, Washington's vacillating foreign policy embittered radical fundamentalists and pushed Iran to create a surrogate aimed at subverting U.S. hegemony in the region.

At the time when Washington was providing arms to Iraq, Iran was funding Lebanon-based Hezbollah, an off-shoot of Khomeini's revolutionary Islamic state, to engage in a proxy war targeting U.S. interests in the Middle East. Hezbollah's primary foe was the secular government in Lebanon which it hoped to transform into an Islamic republic in the Iranian model. However, Hezbollah also sought the elimination of Israel

---

[134] *Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy,* 1986, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/111386c.htm> (March 6, 2008).

[135] Ansari, 105.

and the termination of U.S. influence. The next several years witnessed multiple murders, bombings, kidnappings, and hijackings perpetrated against Americans by Iranian-supported Hezbollah.[136]

Khomeini miscalculated Washington's response to the terrorist attacks by assuming the rising death toll would force the U.S. to 'cut and run' just as it had done in 1979. Although the U.S. did withdrawal from Lebanon within a year of the 1983 barracks bombing, Washington continued to wield its power in the Persian Gulf throughout the Iran-Iraq War and the Vincennes incident, while reportedly an accident, demonstrated Washington's resolve.[137] Because the Iran-Iraq War had such a damaging effect on Iran's military and its economy, Khomeini could ill afford to antagonize the U.S. Iraq too, had suffered greatly through the conflict and thus the Iran-Iraq War ended in a stalemate. Just as Kissinger had hoped, both countries lost. The two countries suffered an estimated million deaths and their militaries were rendered barely capable to serve as anything more than a defensive force. Additionally, the war left both countries with tremendous debt and faltering economies, which in turn, led Iraq to invade Kuwait a few years later and compelled Iran to withdrawal from global politics until such time as it could reinsert itself and attempt to regain lost power.

E.   ISLAMISTS AND IRAQ

In the wake of Khomeini's death in 1989, newly elected President, Akbar Rafsanjani, turned the national attention toward domestic issues in order to recover from the war. Although the war caused significant damage to Iran's economy, it fostered the nationalist spirit that would be required if Iran was to rebuild itself without the support of

---

[136] Until Al Qaeda far surpassed them on September 11, 2001, Hezbollah was responsible for more U.S. deaths than any other terrorist organization. Hezbollah was responsible for a series of violent and deadly terrorist attacks on U.S. targets beginning, in 1983, with a suicide attack on the embassy in Beirut and a similar attack on the U.S. Marine barracks six months later which killed 241 American servicemen. Hezbollah's actions caused tensions between the U.S. and Iran to escalate and culminated in 1988, when the USS Vincennes shot down an Iranian Airbus over the Straits of Hormuz killing 290 civilians. The United States expressed regret for the loss of innocent life and provided compensation to the families of the victims, but refused to make an apology to the Iranian government. For more, see Elizabeth Gamlen and Paul Rogers "U.S. Reflagging of Kuwaiti Oil Tankers," *The Iran-Iraq War: The Politics of Aggression,* ed. Farhang Rajaee (University Press of Florida, 1993), 142.

[137] See footnote 136 and Gamlen and Rogers for more.

a sponsor as it had with the United States. Economically, Rafsanjani benefitted from Iran's vast oil reserves; but he also advocated a free market and enacted liberalizing measures intended to recreate Iran as an industrial power.

Politically, Iran abstained from committing itself in any direction and condemned both the United States and Iraq during the Persian Gulf War. Additionally, the collapse of the Soviet Union meant that it was no longer a threat for the U.S. to balance against. Thus, because the fear of Soviet intervention on behalf of Iran no longer existed, Washington would be less inhibited to engage if Iran threatened the sovereignty of its neighbors. Regardless, Iran continued to sponsor terrorist organizations in a not-so-covert effort to undermine the influence exerted by Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States. However, the realism that defined Cold War era Washington was swept away by the economic idealism of the 1990s and the hesitant foreign policies of the Clinton administration.

1.   Axis of Evil

Critics argue that it was not fear of 'blowback' but rather fear of a backlash from the American public that prevented President Clinton from committing resources to thwart the rising trend of terrorism committed by Iranian surrogates against American targets or those of U.S. allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Rather, he preferred diplomacy even when it continuously failed to produce results. His attempts to strike an accord between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were exercises in futility and contributed to the contempt for the U.S. held by Islamists. Their determination to strike at symbols of U.S. power was evident in 1993, when Islamists made an attempt to knock down the World Trade Center and, again in 2000, when a suicide bomber attempted to sink the USS Cole as it was docked in Yemen. Although both events were funded or organized by Al Qaeda, who as of yet had no obvious ties to Iran, their success convinced extremists everywhere that the U.S. was unwilling to employ military forces. Indeed, the U.S. treated both events more like criminal acts than acts of war. Unfortunately, these events were only small indications of the grand scale violence the extremists were capable of committing.

The non-response by the U.S. was perceived by extremists as weakness and arguably served as encouragement for the fateful attacks of September 11, 2001. However, the brutality of the act and the election of President George W. Bush ensured the U.S. would take a decisive and drastic retaliatory response. Shortly after the attacks, President Bush announced a new course for U.S. foreign policy in which America would "make no distinction between terrorists and those who knowingly harbor or provide aid to them."[138] As such, the President included Iran as part of the 'Axis of Evil' for its support of terrorism and declared it a "grave and growing danger" to American sovereignty.[139] Tensions between Tehran and Washington were never higher, at least until the U.S. placed Iran in the precarious position of being sandwiched between the bulk of America's military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result, Iran was compelled to take a defensive posture and surreptitiously target the U.S. military effort in Iraq.

2.   Opportunity Knocks in Iraq

Iran contributed to the insurgency and targeted the nascent Iraqi government in order to weaken U.S. influence and foster a favorable outcome for Tehran. Furthermore, Tehran believes a stable and prospering Iraq—buttressed by the U.S. and, by extension, Saudi Arabia—will weaken Iran and place the balance of power strongly in favor of the Saudis. Consequently, fundamentalist President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad supports efforts to undermine the U.S. stability process in Iraq, funds anti-U.S. terrorist organizations throughout the region, and refuses to end Iran's nuclear weapons program.[140] Iran's failure to comply with U.N. resolutions and international regulations which govern the

---

[138] George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 17, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf> (March 9, 2008), 5.

[139] Bush, *2002 State of the Union Address,* January 29, 2002 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> (March 9, 2008).

[140] In December 2007, a National Intelligence Estimate revealed that U.S. intelligence agencies have "high confidence" that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in the fall of 2003, possibly in anticipation of a follow-on invasion by U.S. forces. However, President Ahmadinejad refuses to admit or deny the presence of a nuclear weapons program and claims that any attempts to enrich uranium are strictly for the purposes of developing nuclear energy. Unfortunately, Iran will not allow United Nation's investigators access in order to assess the true nature of Iran's nuclear program. For more on the NIE, see United States. National Intelligence Council, "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities."

development of nuclear energy has forced the U.N. to impose increasingly restrictive sanctions on Iran. However, resolutions and sanctions have, to date, proven fruitless.

Because it regards itself a global, vice regional power, Iran considers its goal to obtain nuclear power an expected path to ascendancy as well as a matter of self-defense.[141] The United States, however, considers a nuclear armed Iran a destabilizing threat and has intimated that, if necessary, it will use force to prevent Iran from achieving its goals. To that end, in an effort to "contain the growing power of Iran," Washington recently approved a multi-billion arms deal to Saudi Arabia and its Arab neighbors loyal to the U.S.[142] Saudi Arabia is also committed to the prevention of Iranian influence in the Middle East. However, Riyadh's motivations are largely economic and religious, of which, the latter has reinvigorated the Sunni-Shia divide that has historically defined the animosity between the two nations.

As of late, President Ahmadinejad has directly inserted himself into the fold and, in a recent visit to Iraq—the first such visit by an Iranian President since before the Iran-Iraq War—Ahmadinejad pledged $1 billion in hopes of securing an economic partnership with its neighbor at the expense of U.S. and Saudi influence.[143] During the announcement, Ahmadinejad criticized the U.S. and condemned the occupation, all made worse by the presence and apparent approval of Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki. Ahmadinejad's agenda is obviously intended to engender anti-U.S. sentiment and elicit loyalty from the predominantly Shi'a nation in order to expand the influence of the Iranian-led 'Shi'a Crescent.' Whereas Iraq once stood as a Sunni bastion and the first line of defense against Persian incursion into Arab lands, current efforts to shift Iraq's allegiance would markedly shift power away from the Saudis. Iran's ties to terrorist organizations and nuclear ambitions only intensify its posture as a real and imminent

---

[141] Iran is centrally located amongst several nuclear states (Israel, Russia, Pakistan, India, China) who, because of theological or political differences, serve as potential threats.

[142] Cloud.

[143] Richard A. Oppel, "Ahmadinejad Hails 'New Chapter' in Iran-Iraq Ties," *International Herald Tribune,* March 2, 2008, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/03/02/africa/iraq.php> (March 9, 2008).

threat to stability in the Middle East and throughout the world. Thus, the imbroglio in Iraq is of significant importance and although it stands to determine the regional balance of power, the implications are global.

F.   SUMMARY

Iran's rich and storied history as a military and religious power reached its nadir during the twentieth century but is currently experiencing a renaissance centered in its pursuit of nuclear weapons and embrace of Islamic Fundamentalism. Arguably, the twenty-first century iteration of Iranian power has its roots in Washington's participation in the 1953 coup that ousted the popular nationalist leader in favor of a megalomaniac whose pro-West stance was supportive of U.S. foreign policy at the expense of Iran's social and economic development. Washington's lack of consideration for the coup's potential blowback resulted in a continued misunderstanding of the situation and pushed Tehran further toward an Islamist philosophy which targeted the U.S. as the reason for Iran's social and economic ills. Thus, when the Islamic Revolution cast the United States out in 1979, Iran recreated itself as the principal sponsor of Islamic fundamentalists whose stated goals are the destruction of Israel and the deterioration, if not elimination, of U.S. global hegemony. To that end, Iran re-established itself as the balance to Saudi regional hegemony and continues to seek means to advance its position relative to its Sunni neighbor. Consequently, the current war in Iraq has provided a vehicle by which Iran can intervene and impose its influence, making the outcome a tipping point which will determine the fate of the Middle East as the two powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, vie for regional supremacy. Because the bulk of the world's oil reserves exist in the region, the potential for blowback is a certainty which demands that Washington craft a coherent policy vis-à-vis Iran and Saudi Arabia and considers the likely occurrence of a new arms race.

V.   IRAQ - THE TIPPING POINT

The Iraq War has had many unintended consequences and chief among them is Iran's resurgence as a regional and potentially global power. Author of *All the Shah's Men,* Stephen Kinzer, argues that even as Washington rails against rising Iranian influence in the Middle East, the United States "did Iran the huge favor of destroying the two regimes it feared most: the Taliban…which was run by fanatically anti-Iranian Sunni extremists, and Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq...."[144] Long relegated to defensive posturing, the absence of its primary threats allowed Iran to go on the offensive and to indulge in "opportunistic expansionism" in an attempt to expand its influence into Iraq.[145] Rising Iranian influence forced Riyadh, which maintained a defensive realist foreign policy, to counter Tehran's efforts in the region. The result is a proxy battle between Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two powers compete over territory, economic dominance, and religious authority. Whereas Iraq used to serve as a buffer between the would-be regional competitors, the U.S. invasion and subsequent power plays by Iran and Saudi Arabia have ignited an arms race that promises to result in the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East.

A.   THE ROAD TO SECTARIAN CIVIL WAR

During the Iraq-Iran War, Riyadh supported Iraq because it was concerned that a Shi'a victory would encourage the Shi'a in Saudi Arabia to revolt as well. With a significant population of Shi'a in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh has long endured minor skirmishes with dissidents before and quelled them through a policy of appeasement, coercion, and oppression. Nevertheless, the Sunni al-Saud have always feared a Shi'a uprising which nearly became a reality after the Iranian revolution and

---

[144] Kinzer, xvi.

[145] The phrase "opportunistic expansionism" refers to a time when "conquest is easy [and] aggression is more alluring; it costs less to attempt and succeeds more often." Undoubtedly, this was the case after Saddam fell and the U.S. failed to maintain stability. See, Stephen Van Evera, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed by Robert J. Art, and Kenneth N. Waltz, 6th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 47.

again during the 1991 uprising in southern Iraq.[146] Years later, when U.S. forces entered Baghdad and it became clear that the Americans were ill-prepared to manage the occupation phase of the war, Islamic fundamentalists—under the banner of Shi'a from Iran and Sunni from Saudi Arabia—seized the opportunity to conduct a proxy war in Iraq not only against the U.S. but also against each other. Thus, the fall of Iraq became the tipping point that would alter Iran-Saudi Arabia relations and lead to a belligerent escalation of animosities.[147]

Academics, journalists, and policy makers abound have surmised that sectarian strife was determined to ignite a civil war in Iraq which would spill over and thrust the entire region into chaos as the Shi'a and Sunni finally settle their dispute in armed fashion. There certainly is reason to believe this would be the case; when Baghdad fell and Saddam fled, security also collapsed and Iraqis returned to their tribal alliances.[148] Sunnis and Shi'a groups, sponsored by—if not the governments themselves—agents from Saudi Arabia and Iran who intervened and looked to capitalize on the absence of order by reclaiming ancestral tribal and religious territory. If not for the presence of nearly 200,000 coalition troops, it is likely that Iraq would have indeed fallen into civil war; rather, the commitment to a unified Iraq was tenuously maintained. As it appears less likely that Iraq will fall into sectarian conflict, the tenuous coexistence of Saudi Arabia and Iran assumes a less hostile possibility. However, what divides the two states is also what possesses them to act in ways that increase the threat they represent to each other. Whether it is Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and the formation of a Shi'a

---

[146] Indeed, soon after the Iranian revolution, there were uprisings in Kuwait and in Saudi Arabia; Shiite demonstrations were met with brutal force as the Saudi National Guard leveled Shiite shrines. After the 1991 uprising in Iraq, the Saudi government eased, however slightly, its oppressive policies toward the Shi'a within its borders but nevertheless rendered them politically weak. As long as Iraq served as a buffer state, Saudi Arabia had no motivation to empower its Shi'a population.

[147] At the onset, insurgents committed violent acts in protest over U.S. presence and sought to wreck havoc that would result in enough American deaths that Washington, under pressure from its citizens, would be forced to withdrawal. This method worked in Somalia and Islamic Fundamentalists believed that, because Americans lacked the stomach for a long war, it would likely work again. However, when it became clear that the U.S. troops would not leave as quickly as expected, the fundamentalists' *casus belli* expanded. The mess in Iraq quickly evolved into sectarian driven conflict sponsored by the regional hegemons, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and took Iraq to the brink of civil war.

[148] Despite his oppressive and oft times murderous ways, Saddam maintained the peace within the borders of Iraq. Internal disputes of any sort were quickly quelled because he believed that any unrest would eventually target the regime.

crescent comprised of terrorist sympathizers or an Arab alliance, signified by the recent robust US arms purchases by Saudi Arabia and its Arab neighbors, the advancement in the relative power of one is closely monitored and results in action by the other.

B.   RECENT POWER PLAYS: IRAN

Initially, Iran supported Iraq's compliance with the U.S.-led election process that promised to deliver democracy and the establishment of a national government which, because of their demographic advantage, would presumably be dominated by the Shiites. Indeed, in the elections of 2005, the Shi'a United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) won a majority of seats in the fledgling national government and Prime Minister Maliki is also the leader of the Shi'a Islamic Dawa party. A report by the International Crisis Group notes that the Iranian influence in Iraq is primarily prevalent in the south where there is a greater Shi'a population and politicians whose parties are heavily influenced by Iranian money.[149] However, nationalism is strong throughout Iraq and, despite the Shi'a dominance in the fledgling Iraqi government, Iran has thus far been prevented from exerting significant control within the political realm. Unfortunately, this has compelled Tehran to seek other means of gaining influence.

Soon after the fall of Saddam, forces from within Iran actively supported insurgents and militias that sought to frustrate U.S. and coalition forces out of Iraq, thus giving Iran the opportunity to expand its influence. Commanders frequently found caches of Iranian-made weapons and evidence that Qods forces were training militia organizations in Iraq, a point that compelled President Bush to designate as terrorists the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and issue sanctions against the elite military organization.[150] In April 2008, General Petraeus testified that Iran is using Hezbollah to train and arm militias in order to form a "Hezbollah-like force to serve [Iran's] interest and fight a proxy war against the Iraqi state and coalition forces."[151] Despite the Iranian

---

[149] "Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?" *Middle East Report* 38 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2005), 15-19.

[150] For a detailed list of Iranian caches found , see Katzman, Kenneth, *Iran's Influence in Iraq*, (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, July 9, 2007), 3-4.

[151] Testimony of General David Petraeus quoted in Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, April 9, 2008), 3.

government's promise that such activities stopped months ago, substantial evidence exists that indicate Iran is still providing weapons to anti-coalition forces in Iraq.[152] The most powerful and most dangerous of these organizations is the Mahdi Militia.

According to a March 2007 report to Congress, the Mahdi Militia led by Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr has supplanted al-Qaeda as the greatest threat to stability in Iraq.[153] As the name suggests, the Mahdi Militia draws inspiration from the same messianic impulses that drive Iranian President Ahmadinejad. Indeed, it is widely known that al-Sadr receives spiritual guidance from Iranian clerics and that Tehran has benefitted from al-Sadr's attempts to disrupt stabilization efforts in Iraq.[154] Although al-Sadr has proved a divisive figure in Iraqi politics, he has also contributed to stability in Iraq by imposing a ceasefire on his militia that is widely credited with minimizing sectarian strife and instilling hope that Iraq may emerge from its current state of chaos. However, his motivations are unclear; as long as U.S. forces are bogged down in Iraq, focus is away from Tehran's global ambitions and Washington's options for the denial of nuclear weapons are limited to strategic airstrikes. Contrarily, a stable Iraq would enable Washington to pursue broader military options in an attempt to minimize Iran as a threat. Thus, by imposing the ceasefire it is believed that al-Sadr has lost political favor in Iraq which not only explains why he has been hiding in Iran but also indicates that

---

[152] David Stout, "Top U.S. military officer assails Iran's role in Iraq," *The International Herald Tribune*, April 25, 2008 <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/04/25/mideast/military.php> (May 3, 2008). As recently as May 3, 2008, Iran denied backing militias in Iraq despite evidence presented by Iraqi officials in a conference in Tehran. For more, see Khalid al-Ansary, "Iraq Presents Proof of Iranian Meddling: official," *The Washington Post,* May 2, 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/02/AR2008050201531.html> (May 4, 2008).

[153] Katzman, Kenneth, *Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, April 18, 2008), 33.

[154] The scope of guidance that al-Sadr receives and acts on is subject to speculation but that it exists is uniformly accepted. An International Crisis Group report published in 2005 contained interviews from several Iranian officials who claimed that al-Sadr does not receive direct instruction from Tehran even while admitting that Iran benefits from al-Sadr's actions. However, when he was ordered by Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki to disband his army, al-Sadr sought the council of Shi'a clerics in Iran as well as that of Ayatollah Sistani. Despite Sistani's support for Maliki and the rule of law, al-Sadr's followers refused to lay down their weapons. Additionally, noted Iranian dissident Alireza Jafarzadeh reported in *The Iran Threat* that, for the last two years, Mahdi militia forces travelled to Iran for training. For more, see "Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?" 18; Khaled Farhan, "Iraq's Sadr to Disband Mehdi Army if Clerics Order," *Reuters*, April 7, 2008 <http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080407/wl_nm/iraq_dc_27> (May 4, 2008); and Robert Reid, "Al-Sadr's Followers Refuse to Disband Militia in Iraq," *The Huffington Post*, April 20, 2008 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/20/alsadrs-followers-refuse-_n_97640.html> (May 4, 2008); and Alireza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*, Reprint, (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

nationalism has superseded sectarianism in Iraq. Nevertheless, the imbroglio in Iraq has focused Washington's attention on Iranian activities within the region while Tehran, persistent in its quest for global recognition, has worked to expand its influence outside the greater Middle East.

Despite significant economic restrictions imposed by the United Nations and supported by the U.S., President Ahmadinejad has reached out to countries in Latin America, particularly Venezuela and Cuba, as well as rising economic powers, Russia and China, in order to seek economic and strategic partnerships. The partnership between Iran, Venezuela, and Cuba has obvious roots in an anti-American sentiment but is extending to other countries that would benefit from the oil wealth of Iran and Venezuela "on condition that they alter their stances toward the United States."[155] While this alliance threatens U.S. hegemony in the western hemisphere, Iran's nascent alliance with Russia and China has greater strategic implications. According to a 2006 Congressional Research Service report, Russia's weapons sales to Iran have ballooned since 2000.[156] Furthermore, cash-strapped Russia has expanded its relationship with Iran to include nuclear fuel. China too, purchases weapons from Russia but its ties to Iran result from its desperate need for energy to fuel its burgeoning economy. As such, China is among Iran's largest importers of oil and natural gas thus providing Tehran the financial means it deems necessary to expand its nuclear weapons program.[157] Because Russia and China are prominent members of the UN who have opposed punishing Iran for its refusal to adhere to UN resolutions, Iran is emboldened by the forged alliances and continues its quest for power and hegemony.

C.   RECENT POWER PLAYS: SAUDI ARABIA

While Tehran continues its assault on the status quo and applies the tenets of offensive realism, Riyadh's response has been traditional and predictable. As detailed in

---

[155] Michael Rubin, "Iran's Global Ambition," *Middle East Outlook*, no.3, American Enterprise Institute, March 17, 2008, <http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.27658/pub_detail.asp> May 7, 2008.

[156] As part of an agreement with the U.S., Russia suspended its weapons trade with Iran from 1995 to 2000. For more, see Richard F. Grimmett, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1998-2005* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Services, October 23, 2006).

[157] Katzmann, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses,* 8.

Chapter III, Saudi Arabia has long relied on the U.S. in a policy of buck-passing in order to provide for its defense.[158] In a continuation of that policy, the 2007 arms deal will provide advanced weaponry to Saudi Arabia and its neighbors sending a clear message to Iran that the U.S. is committed to its allies. However, Middle East scholars, Gregory Gause and Toby Jones note that Riyadh has a "sense of urgency" to balance against Iran because Iraq has "already tipped the scales in favor of Iran."[159] Indeed, Riyadh is well aware that if the U.S. were to withdrawal from Iran, the kingdom would be forced to support Sunni guerillas in order to thwart Shi'a influence in Iraq. Thus, while it still prefers to have the U.S. accept the burden of dealing with Iran's aggressive behavior, the "sense of urgency" compels Riyadh to take a more active role in the efforts to stifle Iran's growing influence in the region.

According to Gause, Saudi Arabia is conducting a "nuanced balance of power game" by inserting itself into crises throughout the region in an attempt to limit Iran's influence.[160] Hence, Saudi Arabia has been increasingly involved in discussions regarding the crises in Israel and Lebanon, which, because of its sponsorship of Hamas and Hezbollah, long have been dominated by Iran. In 2002, Abdullah announced a peace plan in which Israel, in exchange for full recognition from the Arab states, would withdrawal to the 1967 borders.[161] Riyadh has also been vocal in its frustration with the presidential crisis in Lebanon. Although Damascus is the primary target, Riyadh also

---

[158] Mearsheimer defines buck-passing as the practice in which a state tries "to get another great power to check the aggressor while they remain on the sidelines." He continues to say that "threatened states usually prefer buck-passing to balancing, mainly because the buck-passer avoids the cost of fighting the aggressor in the event of war." See John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,* 139.

[159] See Gregory Gause, "Saudi Arabia and Iranian Influence," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 10, 2007 <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2007/ioi/070320-gause-cfr.html> (May 10, 2008); and Toby Jones, "Driven by a Sense of Urgency," April 27, 2007 <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2007/ioi/070427-jones-urgency.html> (May 3, 3008).

[160] Gause.

[161] For more details on the initiative, see Prados and Blanchard, 12. The initiative, endorsed by Washington, cost King Abdullah political capital because it runs counter to strict fundamentalist doctrine that calls for the destruction of Israel. Thus, although Saudi Arabia contributes $100 million per year to the Palestinians, the Wahabbis believe the peace plan is another example of the al-Saud regime's proclivity for kowtowing to the U.S. In a 2007 speech to the Arab League, King Abdullah condemned the U.S. action in Iraq as an "illegal foreign occupation." However, rather than drawing U.S. ire, the statement was recognized for what it was, a veiled attempt by Abdullah to distance Riyadh from Washington; a point that was made evident just a few months later when Saudi Arabia and the U.S. agreed to the arms sale that would keep the country beholden to the U.S. for a long time forward. See Fattah's article "Saudi King Condemns U.S. Occupation of Iraq."

includes Tehran and its client, Hezbollah, in its lament. Riyadh believes that if it can cast a large enough shadow on the Syria-Iran alliance while providing financial support to the Lebanese government, Saudi Arabia will emerge as the primary regional power broker.[162] Riyadh's increased involvement in these crises is significant and signals a more proactive posture in its regional diplomatic foreign policy, necessary if Riyadh hopes to curb Tehran's influence. Thus far however, the crisis in Iraq, has been dominated by Iran and Saudi Arabia's diplomatic efforts to deter Iranian influence have fallen short.

Despite the power plays, recent developments give the appearance that détente is possible if not likely. In March 2007, a few months after he became the first sitting President of the Islamic Republic to perform the *hajj*, King Abdullah also invited President Ahmadinejad to Riyadh, his first official visit to the kingdom, and the two held discussions in which they agreed, in principle, to "stop any attempt aimed at spreading sectarian strife in the region."[163] That the two leaders engaged in diplomatic discussions is encouraging but occurs even as both sides are aggressively vying against each other in order to capture power at the other's expense.[164] The promise these talks held was quickly abated as a result of continued sectarian violence in Iraq. In July, Iranian-Saudi relations were further hampered when Saudi muftis issued an anti-Shi'a fatwa and the Saudi government cracked down on Shiites within the kingdom.[165] Undoubtedly, Riyadh

---

[162] Robert F. Worth, "Despite Infighting, Meeting of Arab Leaders Gets Under Way in Damascus," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2008 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/30/world/middleeast/30arab.html> (May 10, 2008).

[163] Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal as quoted in Souhil Karam, "Ahmadinejad, Saudi King Reject Sectarian Strife" *Reuters*, March 3, 2007 <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL0332990520070303?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0> (May 10, 2008); and Hassan Fattah, "Iranian President Meets Saudi to Discuss Mideast Issues," *International Herald Tribune,* March 3, 2007 <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/03/04/africa/web.0304saudi.php> (February 9, 2008).

[164]It is well documented that Tehran is suspected of expanding its influence in Iraq by arming and training Shi'a militias. Contrarily, that Sunni Saudi clerics have surreptitiously funded Sunni insurgents is widely believed but largely ignored, at least in the sense that Washington has not substantiated the evidence or accused Riyadh of direct involvement. Nevertheless, despite public criticism, Riyadh's official position has been to remain politically uninvolved if only to allow the U.S. to continue its efforts unfettered by the baggage of appearing to cater to Saudi Arabia at the expense of the Iraqi people.

[165] "Religious Leaders Voice Outrage at Anti-Shia Fatwa of Saudi Muftis," Islamic Republic News Agency, July 23, 2007, <www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/menu-234/0707236565184405.htm> (May 3, 2007). In an article for the website bitterlemons.org, Toby Jones noted that the kingdom began "suppressing Shiite cultural activities, harassing community leaders, interrupting the observation of religious rituals, and even arresting activists." Toby Jones, "Driven by a Sense of Urgency."

is threatened by rising Iranian influence in Iraq which afforded Ahmadinejad the opportunity to grandstand in a visit to the Iraqi capital in March of this year. Not surprisingly, the visit did little to stem sectarian fueled animosity between Sunni and Shia leaders in Iraq; while Iraqi Shi'a, including Prime Minister Maliki, lauded Ahmadinejad, Sunni leaders condemned the visit and supported the U.S. premise that Iran is fueling the violence in Iraq in order to expand its influence in the troubled state.[166] King Abdullah, on the other hand, has yet to visit Iraq and appears content to pass the buck of dealing with Iran in Iraq to the U.S.

D.   IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

Because Riyadh is unwilling or incapable of presenting a viable counter to Iran's regional influence, Washington is compelled to act if it is determined to prevent Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon and becoming a regional, if not global, power. It is unclear if Iran's nuclear program, which is still subject to close scrutiny from the IAEA, appears to be as advertised; a peaceful venture designed to provide an alternate source of energy for a burgeoning middle class that allows Iran to sell its largest resource.[167] However, Tehran is not known for its transparency and the cloud of mystery that surrounds Iran's nuclear program, coupled with President Ahmadinejad's continued threats toward Israel, render trust a dangerous attribute for makers of U.S foreign policy. Thus, Washington is forced to make critical decisions based on assumptions that will undoubtedly have global implications and dangerous repercussions without the benefit of

---

[166] In stark contrast to the secretive visit to Baghdad by President Bush just three weeks earlier President Ahmadinejad was openly received by Prime Minister Maliki who credited Ahmadinejad with helping to curtail violence in Iraq. Meanwhile, Ahmadinejad attempted to explain the resentment Iraqis feel toward Americans when he stated that "Iraqi people don't like Americans." See Sam Dagher, "Ahmadinejad's Iraq Visit Bolsters Iran's Influence," *csmonitor.com*, March 3, 2008 <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0303/p01s04-wome.html?page=1> (May 24, 2008).

[167] At the time of writing, the IAEA reported that Iran continues to defy UN demands that it suspend its nuclear enrichment activities. President Ahmadinejad has stated that Iran will not comply because he asserts that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful and the UN has no authority to determine Iran's right to develop nuclear energy. Although the report did not disclose any findings that Iran is operating a non-peaceful nuclear program, it did indicate that Iran continues to avoid revealing all the information asked of it. See Scott Peterson, "Nuclear Report: Parsing Iran's Intent," *csmonitor.com*, June 5, 2008 <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0605/p06s02-wome.html> (June 5, 2008); and Mohamed ElBaradei, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007) and 1803 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (Vienna, Austria: International Atomic Energy Agency, May 26, 2008).

all the facts that could make the decisions virtually mathematic. It is a game of chicken that currently rests on the shoulders of two leaders who have been similarly criticized for abiding to their religious impulses.

1. Status Quo - Apocalypse Now

Because the consequences of being wrong have catastrophic results, the Bush Administration has chosen to err on the side of caution. That is to say, if the words of President Ahmadinejad are to be taken literally, than the administration is currently acting on assumptions that empower policy makers to develop courses of action aimed at preventing Iran from achieving its stated goals. The assumptions are:

- The development of nuclear power is designed to disguise Tehran's primary agenda of developing nuclear weapons in order to reestablish itself as a regional and global power.[168]

- That once it achieves nuclear power, Tehran will be emboldened to pursue a more hostile stance toward Israel that could include the nuclear destruction of the Jewish state and could also target the U.S. and other allies.[169]

- Tehran's motivation for its belligerent rhetoric is founded in its messianic beliefs that the world must exist in a state of chaos in preparation for the return of the 12th Imam.[170]

If one is to accept these assumptions, the implications are frightening and explain President Bush's concern that a nuclear armed Iran could spark a world war.[171] It is no wonder then that the current administration continues to emphasize that, as long as Bush remains in office, a nuclear armed Iran will not be tolerated. Critics of this logic argue

---

[168] The UN Security Council has imposed three sets of sanctions on Iran for its failure to end its pursuit of uranium enrichment. The council provided incentives that would provide Iran the enriched uranium it would need for a safe nuclear energy program. However, the enrichment process which Iran seeks and the council hopes to deny is the technology that allows the development of weapons grade uranium.

[169] As recently as May, as Israel and the world celebrated the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Jewish state, President Ahmadinejad called Israel a "stinking corpse," an implication that its end was near.

[170] See Chapter II, *Rational Actors*. Contrary to this assumption is a Washington Post report out of Tehran that leading Iranian clerics have criticized President Ahmadinejad for his continued assertion that modern day Iran is led by the Imam. See Thomas Erdbrink, "Ahmadinejad Criticized for Saying Long-Ago Imam Mahdi Leads Iran," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/07/AR2008050703587.html?hpid=topnews> (May 27, 2008).

[171] George Bush, "Press Conference by the President," *TheWhiteHouse.gov*, October 17, 2007 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071017.html> (May 27, 2008).

that President Bush is too driven by religious impulses and cannot discriminate between obligation to his beliefs and a responsibility to seek a more pragmatic foreign policy.

With the bulk of the U.S. military, particularly the ground forces, committed to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, any threats of military action appear disingenuous or lacking teeth. Thus, if Bush is to be believed, the military option is limited to strategic strikes from the air and sea aimed at decapitation of the leadership in Tehran as well as the destruction of any and all sites suspected of contributing to Iran's nuclear energy program. Although these strikes may indeed prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, the U.S. will again be perceived as an imperialist crusader nation bent on the destruction of Muslim regimes. Therefore, it is critical that the U.S. not act without the endorsement of the international community. Additionally, the crisis in Iraq serves as a lesson as to what happens when severe measures are taken based on inferior intelligence. Unfortunately, Iran's unwillingness to comply with UN resolutions forces the U.S. and the international community to act without the benefit of all the facts but certainly before it is too late.

Since November 2007, when the National Intelligence Council published its findings that indicated that Iran halted its nuclear program in 2003, there have been several reports, as well as statements out of Iran, that clearly show significant progress toward the attainment of nuclear weapons. In addition to the suspected relationship between Iran, Syria, and North Korea based in the exchange of nuclear technology, President Ahmadinejad has traveled to nuclear powers India, Russia, and China, in order to forge alliances currently based in energy but would ostensibly support a nuclear armed Iran.[172] In April, President Ahmadinejad publicly lauded his country's efforts when he announced that Iran had installed 6000 new centrifuges; this despite the insistence from the IAEA that Iran suspend the program until thorough inspections are completed and it is determined that its program is truly designed for peaceful purposes.[173]

---

[172] Indeed, fuel-strapped India has been one of the more vocal supporters of Iran's quest for nuclear power. Russia too, has contributed to Iran's nuclear program and provided technology and intellectual capital for its reactor in Bushehr. Like India, China is in desperate need of alternative energy sources and is willing to make concessions with Iran in exchange for oil and natural gas.

[173] The IAEA claims that Tehran was exaggerating its claims but did acknowledge the existence of enough centrifuges that, given time, could produce enough enriched uranium for several nuclear weapons.

It is fear of the unknown but with an eye toward the worst that compels President Bush to prepare for war with Iran even as his credibility and political capital have reached historic lows. His resolve is so strong that he is willing to risk the immediate future of his party as well as what is left of U.S. global hegemony. If President Bush's faith and his pledge to protect the citizens of this country are to be believed, than it must be assumed that he has considered the potential cost in human capital and that the lives of more U.S. troops are an acceptable risk and a preferred alternative to the possibility of hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths as a result of a nuclear attack on Israel or the U.S. However, the same resolve that compels Bush to prepare for war has had the secondary effect of launching the region into an arms race in which the Sunni U.S. allies have begun to seek nuclear weapons to defend against a potentially nuclear Iran.

Indeed, the administration agreed last year to provide arms to its Sunni allies in an effort to thwart Iran's regional influence. However, critics were concerned that the weapons deal would only antagonize Tehran and further embolden them to stay the course. After all, as balance of power theory supports, Iran could now assert that it is merely behaving in a defensive manner because it is the threatened country surrounded by heavily armed Sunnis sponsored by a nuclear armed U.S. that has already shown a proclivity to invade a sovereign nation. Rather than reducing the threat from Iran, critics argue that the U.S. only cemented Tehran's resolve. Continued application of balance of power theory accepts that, since Iran began its relentless quest for nuclear energy, all six members of the GCC have announced their intentions of acquiring nuclear power.[174] These states certainly believe that Tehran's nuclear ambitions are offensive in nature and, because of his aggressive rhetoric, the GCC states are compelled to take a defensive stance and balance against the threat posed by Iran. In perhaps the most significant development to occur that clearly shows the dangerous implications of balance of power

---

[174] Also mentioned in Chapter II, see Glover. Also, in January, France signed a nuclear cooperation deal to build nuclear power stations in the United Arab Emirates.

theory, in May 2008, President Bush reportedly signed an agreement with King Abdullah to provide enriched uranium to Saudi Arabia.[175]

Although Saudi Arabia has been a longtime U.S. ally, its record of governance exists in complete contrast to American ideals and its contribution to regional instability is cause for grave concern. More presciently, as the primary religious, economic, and military adversary to Iran, the U.S. has knowingly and willingly agreed to provide the very materials that Iran has shown a ruthlessness to acquire and use at its earliest opportunity. Understanding that it is the enrichment technology itself that proves most dangerous, the transfer of nuclear materials nevertheless sends a clear message to Iran; that the U.S. is prepared to provide Saudi Arabia the materials necessary to balance against Iran. The U.S. is clearly following balance of power doctrine, however, this Cold War methodology has not proven to be an effective deterrent but has instead only excited an unstable adversary. Thus, the U.S. must consider alternative solutions rather than continue to fuel a dangerous arms race.

2.   A New Course - Diplomacy

The status quo method of deterrence that President Bush is currently following has yet to show any signs of success; rather, Iran continues to defy international rule and the U.S. has provided billions of dollars in weapons and nuclear technology to some of the most oppressive governments in the world. That is why critics of the Bush doctrine support diplomatic engagement as an alternative solution. Unfortunately, just as there is no indication that Iran is responsive to threats, there is also no indication that Iran would respond to diplomacy. Nevertheless, some politicians, political scientists, analysts, journalists, historians, and the like believe that negotiations could achieve the national objectives that evade our current policies. The matter of whether or not the U.S. should

---

[175] The program is advertised as a peaceful program that will provide the kingdom with a civil energy program as an alternate to oil at a time when the price of oil nears $130 per barrel. It is also intended to prevent Saudi Arabia from developing its own nuclear program which risks the proliferation of nuclear weapons. However, regardless of whether or not it is an ally, that President Bush is apparently willing to exchange nuclear technology for oil concessions with an authoritarian regime that possesses a deplorable human rights record runs contrary to the administration's agenda of working with and developing liberal democracies. See Scott Stearns, "Bush in Saudi Arabia for Nuclear Deal," *VOAnews.com*, May 16, 2008. <http://voanews.com/english/2008-05-16-voa23.cfm> (June 4, 2008).

diplomatically engage Iran has even become the most divisive matter between presumptive presidential nominees Barack Obama and John McCain.

Of course, belief that Iran would be responsive to diplomacy requires acceptance of another core set of assumptions. They are:

- President Ahmadinejad is not the primary power broker and Iran is guided by secular, vice spiritual, impulses.[176]

- The achievement of nuclear power is truly designed for peaceful purposes that will allow Iran to use its natural resources to finance development in an otherwise stagnant economy.[177]

- Once nuclear power is acquired, Iran will act in accordance with international regulations.

- In addition to its use as an alternative energy source, Iran seeks nuclear power to balance against the perceived threat of increased U.S. influence in the region as well as a hostile Israel.

As a sovereign nation, Iran certainly has the right to defend itself against threats posed by neighboring nations. To that end, nuclear weapons serve as the ultimate deterrent. There are even some who believe that the proliferation of nuclear weapons would actually contribute to regional stability.[178] Indeed, as the dominant Shi'a regime in the region, Iran is surrounded by traditional enemies that are supported by the U.S. This was made all the more disconcerting for Tehran after 9/11 and President Bush included

---

[176] Because the Republic of Iran is founded under Islamic principles, it is difficult to assume that there may ever be a separation of church and state. However, this is the fundamental assumption that must be believed for hope to exist that diplomacy can work.

[177] Although Iran continues to assert that its nuclear program is intended for peaceful purposes, the IAEA reported in May that Iran will not comply with inspections that would dispel rumors to the contrary. The report contends that Iran is in fact engaging in delaying tactics and is otherwise not acting in good faith. See, "Iran's Failed 'Litmus Test'," *The Washington Post*, editorial May 28, 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/27/AR2008052702752.html> (May 28, 2008). Additionally, Iran's continued defiance of international law has resulted in several economically damaging sanctions. Should Tehran comply and it is determined that its program is safe, it is easy to imagine that the sanctions would be lifted and Iran would enjoy a boon of economic activity.

[178] As discussed in Chapter II, Kenneth Waltz has argued that the 'spread' of nuclear weapons would serve as a greater deterrent to war and therefore would promote stability amongst traditionally hostile adversaries. Waltz, however, does little to address the possibility of religiously motivated non-state actors acquiring and detonating a nuclear weapon to advance their beliefs. He argues that states in possession of nuclear weapons will be more inclined to adopt international rules and will have the security necessary to protect against this event. See Sagan, 1-45. Thomas P.M. Barnett also argued that a nuclear armed Iran, under the guidance of the international community, would serve as the Muslim counter-balance to nuclear-armed Israel and would contribute to regional stability. Barnett contends that Iran should be accepted as a rational actor rather than a state that is currently backed into a corner with the full threat of the international community which has in turn spurred its quest for a counter balance. See Barnett.

Iran in the 'Axis of Evil' which, after the invasion of Iraq, appeared to designate Iran as the next target of U.S. aggression. It is perhaps understandable then that Iran should want to acquire nuclear weapons in order to bolster its defensive posture which, according to Waltz, would deter potentially hostile states from attacking. However, uncertainty and Iran's unwillingness to be forthright gives reason to believe that Iran has nothing other than offensive intentions with its nuclear program. Thus, if IAEA inspectors are accurate in their assessment that Tehran is engaging in stall tactics while continuing to enrich uranium, it may be best to negotiate now before Iran acquires greater leverage or before it is too late.

Certainly the cost of not negotiating is severe, especially if one considers the potential cost to human life. However, unlike with the status quo policy and the assumptions listed earlier in which there are actions and comments that demonstrate their sincerity, there is nothing to indicate that Tehran would be responsive to diplomacy. Negotiations have chiefly been rejected because Washington demands that Tehran accepts preconditions prior to discussions.[179] Furthermore, although clerics have admonished Ahmadinejad for his comments regarding the 12th Imam, no one else in Iran's leadership is providing an alternate or secular viewpoint.[180] Additionally, Tehran continues to defy UN resolutions and deny inspectors the access necessary to exonerate Iran from incriminating speculation that it is indeed developing a nuclear weapons program that, once achieved, will be used to destroy Israel as is often intimated by

---

[179] Among the preconditions is compliance with UN resolutions that demand Tehran suspends its uranium enrichment program. To illustrate how divisive the matter has become, in May, Barack Obama indicated that, if he were elected president, he would be willing to talk with Iran without preconditions. Amir Taheri, "Obama to A'Jad: Atomic Assist," *nypost.com*, May 21, 2008, <http://www.nypost.com/seven/05212008/postopinion/opedcolumnists/obama_to_ajad__atomic_assist_111819.htm?page=0> (May 28, 2008)

[180] There have been repeated reports that clerics inside Iran have criticized Ahmadinejad for his remarks about the Mahdi and have asked him to tone down the anti-Israel rhetoric. However, Ahmadinejad's continued actions to the contrary indicate that the demands are insincere or meant to placate Iran's adversaries.

President Ahmadinejad.[181] It is becoming apparent that Tehran's lack of transparency and failure to comply with international law — coupled with President Ahmadinejad's antagonistic rhetoric — presuppose hostile intentions that demand immediate and stern action from Washington in order to achieve national objectives with respect to Iran's nuclear program.

In 2006, the U.S. State Department proposed direct negotiations between representatives from the U.S. and Iran. As a precondition to those meetings, the U.S. demanded that Iran suspend its enrichment program. Not surprisingly, Iran refused and continues to assert that it will negotiate only if no preconditions are established. To be fair, it seems disingenuous that, prior to ever meeting, the U.S. would demand Iran do the very thing that the negotiations were intended to discuss. It would also be duplicitous of the U.S., given its own history of support of insurgent activity in the name of national interests, to demand that Iran cease funding to the insurgency in Iraq as well as its sponsorship of terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah.

Since 2006, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have offered Iran new incentives that would seem to satisfy Iran's quest for nuclear energy as well as expand trade. Tehran rejected the incentives which compelled the UN to approve a third round of sanctions. Tehran's continued rejection of international rules and norms is indicative of a state that is attempting to hide its true intentions; a conclusion that is supported by the recent IAEA report that accuses Iran of not being completely forthright. Thus, it is easy to conclude that Iran would not respond to negotiations—with or without preconditions—that would satisfy the UN's demand that Tehran suspend its uranium enrichment program.

E.   CONCLUSIONS

1.   Offensive or Defensive?

The U.S. and Iran are currently at a dangerous impasse and the strategy currently employed by the Bush Administration rests on the notion that the tenets of realism apply

---

[181] See Peterson and ElBaradei.

to the system. The evidence suggests that Iran's incendiary rhetoric and shadowy nuclear program are consistent with offensive realism in which Tehran seeks absolute power at the expense of others. It is undeniable that Tehran seeks to achieve great power status; whereas Iran was traditionally limited to serving as sponsor to non-state actors acting on its behalf, the imbroglio in Iraq created an opportunity for Iran to reinsert itself into great power politics. In addition to its nuclear ambitions, Tehran has engaged in a proxy war in Iraq with the U.S. and Great Britain that, on occasion, escalated into direct engagement.[182] This behavior is implicit of a state bent on aggressive and offensive posturing and the severity is only heightened by the tenacity of the aggressor and the strength of its target. As Mearsheimer posits, "to qualify as a great power, a state must have sufficient military assets to put up a serious fight in an all out conventional war against the most powerful state in the world."[183]

Certainly it can be argued that Tehran is simply testing the U.S. resolve particularly at a time when the full measure of U.S. military power cannot be employed due to its commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, Iran is taking advantage of a perceived vulnerability to demonstrate the relative strength of its military. However, Tehran is well aware that it could not withstand the full onslaught of an unencumbered U.S. military; which is why Iran is fervently engaged in developing its nuclear weapons program. According to Mearsheimer, "In the nuclear age great powers must have a nuclear deterrent that can survive a nuclear strike against it, as well as formidable forces."[184] Should the U.S. reach a time when it is no longer required to commit so much in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran must present a significant deterrent or it will no longer have the leverage it currently uses as a stall tactic in order to prevent direct confrontation. Only then could Iran's quest for nuclear weapons be mistaken as a defensive measure.

---

[182] As mentioned earlier, Iran is alleged to have provided weapons and training to the insurgency in Iraq. Tensions escalated in March 2007, when 15 Royal Marines and sailors were captured by Iranian forces in disputed territorial waters between Iran and Iraq. The latest example occurred in January 2008, when U.S. warships bound for the Persian Gulf encountered Iranian speedboats engaged in provocative actions while traversing through the Straits of Hormuz.

[183] Mearsheimer, 5.

[184] Ibid.

2.   Buck-passing or Balancing?

In an attempt to distract critics, President Ahmadinejad has argued that Iran is actually the threatened country. During an interview in 2006, Ahmadinejad stated that he "fully opposed the behavior of the behavior of the British and the Americans" because of their support of Israel which "threatens the future of all peoples…."[185] By casting the West and Israel as the aggressors, Ahmadinejad has attempted to defend Iran's nuclear ambitions as a necessary deterrent to hostile intentions which, after the invasion of Iraq, would seem to have credence. However, Tehran's constant refusal to disclose information on its nuclear program demonstrates the type of behavior consistent with power seekers and not states that are, as Waltz posits, merely aiming to survive. If that were the case, that Iran is simply seeking security, than it could engage in buck-passing by aligning itself with other great powers. Russia and China are both formidable powers that have shown a willingness to engage Iran despite international opinion.[186] Indeed, the continued dialogue amongst the three states is cause for concern but true buck-passing by Iran would preclude the need for nuclear weapons. Rather, it is apparent that Tehran is attempting to balance against perceived threats.

However, balance of power theory can only truly be applied when all participants are rational actors and behave in a predictable manner. As shown in this paper, throughout the twentieth century, Saudi Arabia and Iran employed a policy of buck-passing to defend against external threats which fell directly upon the U.S. to serve as the balance to regional threats in a global system. While Saudi Arabia continues to rely on the U.S. for its defense, Iran, beginning with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, has taken a decidedly offensive approach but does not appear to be motivated by pragmatic foreign policy constraints. Unfortunately, this precludes the notion that Iran would be motivated by the typical application of sticks as is currently being administered by the Bush Administration or carrots as a result of diplomatic negotiations.

---

[185] Mike Wallace, "Iranian Leader Opens Up, Ahmadinejad Speaks Candidly With Mike Wallace About Israel, Nukes, Bush," CBS News, August 13, 2006.
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/08/09/60minutes/main1879867.shtml> (June 5, 2006).

[186] Mearsheimer and Walt would both support the idea that Iran's geostrategic location would make it ideally suited for buck-passing with Russia, China or both. See Mearsheimer, 269-272 and Walt 153-161.

3.   What Now?

If it can be presumed that Tehran's actions are consistent with offensive realism and balancing behavior than a well-fashioned response that would achieve strategic goals should be attainable. Because states acting offensively seek absolute power at the expense of all else, outside of military action there is little any state or international agency can do to prevent a state from achieving its objectives. Balancing too, assumes that states will respond to the perceived threats that surround them. If that is the case with Iran than the U.S. should reconsider its agreement to arm Iran's Sunni neighbors because the measure can only be construed as an attempt to prepare these states for an escalation of tensions. Furthermore, the offer to provide the GCC states with peaceful nuclear energy programs in an attempt to dissuade them from developing their own uranium enrichment program will also be interpreted as a threat to Iran's security and would certainly result in regional instability if not full scale conflict. This brings us to Waltz; he argues that stability can be achieved through the spread of nuclear weapons. Of course, this idea demands that the actors are rational which makes this notion an all too dangerous proposition.

The crux of the issue then is the behavior of Ahmadinejad as a reflection of the power brokers in Tehran and their credibility as rational actors. Vali Nasr, noted scholar on Iranian affairs, recently wrote in *Foreign Affairs:*

> Iran is not, despite common depictions, a messianic power determined to overturn the regional order in the name of Islamic militancy; it is an unexceptionally opportunistic state seeking to assert predominance in its immediate neighborhood. Thus, the task at hand for Washington is to create a situation in which Iran will find benefit in limiting its ambitions and in abiding by international norms.[187]

However, as Amir Taheri wrote in a recent opinion piece for *The Wall Street Journal*, "The Islamic Republic does not know how to behave: as a nation-state, or as the embodiment of a revolution with universal messianic pretensions. Is it a country or a

---

[187] Vali Nasr, "The Costs of Containing Iran," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (February 2008): 92.

cause?"[188] Ahmadinejad continues to call for the destruction of Israel, while Iran defies the international community with its uranium enrichment program. President Ahmadinejad appears to represent an irrational unpredictability that cannot be swayed by the types of carrots and sticks currently imposed by the United Nations. As Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently pointed out, negotiations will not work unless the UN develops "leverage, either through economic or diplomatic or military pressures, on the Iranian government so that they believe they must have talks with the United States because there is something they want from us."[189] Therefore, unless Iran determines its motivations and subsequently responds to the international community's attempts to placate its objectives, it should be concluded that Iran is an irrational actor in which case normal rules of international politics do not apply.

This is not to imply that the U.S. should immediately begin strategic strikes against Iran. Because the risk of failure is so great, it would seem that the administration has an obligation to exhaust all methods of enticement which should include diplomacy without preconditions. However, the notion that Tehran would be given a second or even a third chance to demonstrate behavior consistent of a modern nation-state is to believe that it is willing to alter its ideology. It also demonstrates a reluctance to take decisive action and connotes weakness of resolve. Unfortunately, until the other members of the Security Council are prepared to use the military in strategic strikes against Iran's nuclear program, the U.S. can ill afford to accept full responsibility against another target in a region that has already demonized the 'Great Satan' for its century-long meddling in its affairs. Conversely, the U.S. cannot afford to wait until Iran has achieved nuclear status which explains why the Bush Administration continues to direct its ire toward Tehran while seemingly preparing the nation for another war. The U.S. is obligated to deny Iran the status enjoyed by modern nation-states and should therefore, refrain from open and direct negotiations with the rogue state. Iran must first demonstrate that it is prepared to accept the burdens of nuclear status and recognize that it has a requisite responsibility to

---

[188] Amir Taheri, "The Problem with Talking to Iran" *TheWallStreetJournal Online*, May 28, 2008 <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121193151568724469.html?mod=opinion_main_commentaries> (May 29, 2008).

[189] "Iran's Failed 'Litmus Test'."

conform to international laws. Until that is clearly demonstrated by the power brokers in Iran, the Bush Administration is behaving within reason to believe that Tehran is not bound by the tenets of realism and balance of power theory and will not be swayed by traditional sticks or carrots.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Ahmadinejad, Mahmoud. "Full Text of President Ahmadinejad's Speech before General Assembly, September 26, 2007." United Nations. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2007/iran-070926-irna01.htm> (April 9, 2008).

———. "Full Text of President Ahmadinejad's Speech before General Assembly, September 17, 2005." United Nations. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2005/iran-050918-irna02.htm> (April 9, 2008).

al-Ansary, Khalid. "Iraq Presents Proof of Iranian Meddling: official." *The Washington Post*. May 2, 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/02/AR2008050201531.html> (May 4, 2008).

al-Shayji, Abdullah. "Iraq's Most Influential Neighbor." *gulfnews.com*, March 11, 2008. <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/print_friendly_version.jsp?global_name=/channels/gulfnews_com/articles/08/03/11/10196519.html> (May 24, 2008).

Allison, Graham T. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 1999.

Ansari, Ali M. *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books, 2006.

Art, Robert J. and Kenneth N. Waltz. *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*. 6th ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

Associated Press "Iranian Official Slams Ahmadinejad."CBS News. February 27, 2008 <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/02/27/world/main3885202.shtml> (April 12, 2008).

Bahgat, Gawdat. "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran." *International Studies Perspectives* 7 (2006): 124-136.

Baker, James A. and Lee Hamilton. *The Iraq Study Group Report*. 1st authorized. New York: Vintage Books, 2006.

Bandow, Doug. *"The U.S. Alliance with Saudi Arabia," Cato Handbook for Congress: Policy Recommendations for the 108th Congress.* Washington D.C. The CATO Institute, 2007.

Barnett, Thomas P.M. "Securing the Middle East with a Nuclear Iran?" *theGobalist.com*, January 24, 2006. <http://www.theglobalist.com/storyid.aspx?StoryId=5076> (May 27, 2008).

Belasco, Amy. *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations since 9/11,* Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, July 16, 2007.

Bill, James A. *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Bowden, Mark. *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam.* New York*:* Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006.

Bronson, Rachel. *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. "Rethinking Religion: The Legacy of the U.S.-Saudi Relationship." *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2005): 121-137.

Brown, Seyom. *The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy from Truman to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Burns, R. N. "United States Policy Toward Iran: Opening Statement before the House International Relations Committee." U.S. State Department. <http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2006/62779.htm> (August 7, 2007).

Bush, George W. "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America." September 17, 2002. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf> (March 9, 2008).

———. "2002 State of the Union Address." <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.Html> (March 9, 2008.

———. "Press Conference by the President." *TheWhiteHouse.gov*, October 17, 2007. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071017.html> (May 27, 2008).

Carpenter, Ted G. "Talk to Iran; it's Working with N. Korea." OC Register. <http://www.ocregister.com/opinion/korea-north-nuclear-1784725-iran-states> (August 7, 2007).

Carr, Edward Hallett. *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939; an Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. London: Macmillan and co., limited, 1940.

Carter, Jimmy. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1982.

———. "1980 State of the Union Address."
<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml>. (August 30, 2008.

Cline, Ray S. *The CIA Under Reagan, Bush & Casey: The Evolution of the Agency from Roosevelt to Reagan*. Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1981.

Cloud, David S. "U.S. Set to Offer Huge Arms Deal to Saudi Arabia." *The New York Times,* July 28, 2007, sec. A; Foreign Desk.

Cooper, Helene and Mazzetti Mark. "Rice Outlines Saudi Arms Package." *New York Times,* July 30, 2007, sec. Europe.

Cordesman, Anthony H. and Nawaf Obaid. Saudi National Security: Military and Security Services- Challenges & Developments. Full Report, Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies. Working Draft: Revised September 30, 2004, <http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/sns_military.pdf> (March 30, 2008).

Dagher, Sam. "Ahmadinejad's Iraq Visit Bolsters Iran's Influence." *csmonitor.com*, March 3, 2008. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0303/p01s04-wome.html?page=1> (May 24, 2008).

Eisenhower, Dwight D. "The Eisenhower Doctrine on the Middle East, A Message to Congress, January 5, 1957." The Department of State Bulletin, XXXV1, No. 917 (January 21, 1957), pp. 83-87. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1957eisenhowerdoctrine.html> (March 13, 2008).

ElBaradei, Mohamed. *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007) and 1803 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Vienna, Austria: International Atomic Energy Agency, May 26, 2008.

Elm, Mostafa. *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and its Aftermath,* Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, 1994.

Erdbrink, Thomas. "Ahmadinejad Criticized for Saying Long-Ago Imam Mahdi Leads Iran." *The Washington Post*. May 8, 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/07/AR2008050703587.html?hpid=topnews> (May 27, 2008).

Ernsberger, Richard,Jr. Religion Versus Reality. *Newsweek,* December 12, 2005. 28.

Esposito, John L. *Islam: The Straight Path*. Rev. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Farhan, Khaled. "Iraq's Sadr to Disband Mehdi Army if Clerics Order." *Reuters*, April 7, 2008 <http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080407/wl_nm/iraq_dc_27> (May 4, 2008).

Fathi, Nazila and William J. Broad. "Iran Says it's Installing New Centrifuges." *New York Times,* April 9, 2008.

Fattah, Hassan M. "Saudi King Condemns U.S. Occupation of Iraq." *New York Times,* Mar 28, 2007, sec. International.

Ford, Peter. "Europe Cringes at Bush 'Crusade' Against Terrorists." *Christian Science Monitor* (2001): 12.

Gamlen, Elizabeth and Paul Rogers. "U.S. Reflagging of Kuwaiti Oil Tankers." In *The Iran-Iraq War: The Politics of Aggression,* edited by Farhang Rajaee. University Press of Florida, 1993.

Gasiorowski, Mark J. "The 1953 Coup D'Etat in Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 261-286.

Gause, Gregory. "Saudi Arabia and Iranian Influence." *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 10, 2007. <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2007/ioi/070320-gause-cfr.html> May 10, 2008.

Glasser, Susan B. "'Martyrs' in Iraq Mostly Saudis." *Washington Post,* May 15, 2005, sec. 15.

Glover, Peter C. "Sunni States' Fears of Iran Trigger Middle East Nuclear Race." World Politics Review. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=1323> (March 30, 2008).

Grimmett, Richard F. *U.S. Arms Sales: Agreements with and Deliveries to Major Clients, 1999-2006.* Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, December 20, 2007.

———. *Conventional Arms Transfers to the Third World, 1986-1993.* Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Services, July 29, 1994.

———. *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1998-2005.* Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Services, October 23, 2006.

Hafezi, Parisa. "Iran Ex-President Slams Ahmadinejad on Economy." Reuters. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKHAF14640220071221?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0> (April 12, 2008).

Hall, Edward T. *The Silent Language*. Anchor, 1973.

Hassan, Hussein D. *Iran: Profile and Statements of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.* Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, March 10, 2008.

Herz, John H. "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950): 157-180.

"Iran's Failed 'Litmus Test'." *The Washington Post*. Editorial May 28, 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/27/AR2008052702752.html> (May 28, 2008).

"Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?" *Middle East Report* 38. Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2005.

Jafarzadeh, Alireza. *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*. Reprint. New York: Palgrave, 2008.

Jervis, Robert. "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate." *International Security.* Vol 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 42-63.

Jones, Toby. "Driven by a Sense of Urgency." Bitterlemons.org. April 27, 2007 <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2007/ioi/070427-jones-urgency.html> (May 3, 3008).

Karam, Souhil. "Ahmadinejad, Saudi King Reject Sectarian Strife." *Reuters*, March 3, 2007. <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL0332990520070303?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0.> May 10, 2008.

Katzman, Kenneth. *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses.* Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, December 28, 2007.

———. *Iran's Influence in Iraq.* Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, July 9, 2007.

———. *Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security.* Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, April 18, 2008.

Kinzer, Stephen. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. 2008 ed. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

Kovirak, Bill. "The Oil Reserve Fallacy." <http://www.radford.edu/~wkovarik/oil/5oilreservehistory.html> (December 29, 2007).

Lavian, Maurice. "How Iran has Strengthened the U.S./Saudi Alliance." The Middle East Now. <http://www.themiddleeastnow.com/ussaudialliance.html> (August 6, 2007).

Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton, 2001.

———. "The False Promise of International Institutions." *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 5-49.

Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics Among Nations; the Struggle for Power and Peace*. 1st ed. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948.

Nasr, Vali. *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2007.

———. "The Costs of Containing Iran." *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (February 2008): 85-94.

de Nesnera, Andre. "Experts Urge Direct U.S.-Iranian Talks to Resolve Nuclear Issue." Voice of America. http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2006-04/2006-04-28-voa52.cfm?CFID=186491434&CFTOKEN=96178073 (August 8, 2007).

Oppel, Richard A. "Ahmadinejad Hails 'New Chapter' in Iran-Iraq Ties." *International Herald Tribune,* March 2, 2008, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/03/02/africa/iraq.php> (Mar 9, 2008).

Oren, Michael B. *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007.

Orszag, Peter. *Estimated Costs of U.S. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and of Other Activities Related to the War on Terrorism*. Washington D.C.: Congressional Budget Office, October 24, 2007.

Parsi, Trita. *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Paul, T. V., Michel Fortmann, and James J. Wirtz, eds. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century.* Stanford University Press, 2004.

Peterson, Scott. "Nuclear Report: Parsing Iran's Intent." *csmonitor.com*, June 5, 2008. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0605/p06s02-wome.html> (June 5, 2008).

Phillips, David. "Pragmatism Needed in U.S.-Iran Relations." Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/publication.html?id=6841> (August 7, 2007).

Prados, Alfred B. and Christopher M. Blanchard. *Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations.* Congressional Research Service, April 13, 2007.

Reagan, Ronald. *Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy.* November 13, 1986, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/111386c.htm> (March 6, 2008).

Reid, Robert. "Al-Sadr's Followers Refuse to Disband Militia in Iraq." *The Huffington Post*. April 20, 2008 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/20/alsadrs-followers-refuse-_n_97640.html> (May 4, 2008).

"Religious Leaders Voice Outrage at Anti-Shia Fatwa of Saudi Muftis." Islamic Republic News Agency. July 23, 2007 <www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/menu-234/0707236565184405.htm> (May 3, 2007).

RIA Novosti. "Iran Accuses Bush of Trying to Destabilize Persian Gulf." Russian News and Information Agency. <http://en.rian.ru/world/20080403/102906079.html> (April 3, 2008).

Rubin, Michael. "Iran's Global Ambition." *Middle East Outlook*. No. 3, March 17, 2008. American Enterprise Institute. <http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.27658/pub_detail.asp> May 8, 2008.

Sagan, Scott D. and Kenneth N. Waltz. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995.

Sands, David R. "Ahmadinejad Calls Holocaust 'a Myth'." *The Washington Times,* December 15, 2005, sec. WORLD.

Sieff, Martin. "Sand in our Eyes: U.S.-Saudi Relations After Iraq." *The National Interest* (2004): 93-94.

Slavin, Barbara. *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007.

Stearns, Scott. "Bush in Saudi Arabia for Nuclear Deal." *VOAnews.com*, May 16, 2008 <http://voanews.com/english/2008-05-16-voa23.cfm> (June 4, 2008).

Stohl, Rachel. "The Saudi Arms Deal: Congressional Opposition Grows." Center for Defense Information. August 7, 2007 <http://www.cdi.org/program/document.cfm?DocumentID=4057&from_page=../index.cfm> (August 11, 2007).

Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. "Nuclear-Armed Iran Risks World War, Bush Says." *The New York Times*, October 18, 2007, sec. Washington. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/18/washington/18prexy.html?_r=1&oref=slogin> (May 26, 2008).

Stout, David. "Top U.S. military officer assails Iran's role in Iraq." *The International Herald Tribune*, April 25, 2008. http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/04/25/mideast/military.php. (May 3, 2008).

Taheri, Amir. "Obama to A'Jad: Atomic Assist." *nypost.com*, May 21, 2008.
    <http://www.nypost.com/seven/05212008/postopinion/opedcolumnists/obama_to_aj
    ad__atomic_assist_111819.htm?page=0> (May 28, 2008).

———. "The Problem with Talking to Iran." *TheWallStreetJournal Online*, May 28,
    2008.
    <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121193151568724469.html?mod=opinion_main_c
    ommentaries> (May 29, 2008).

Takeyh, Ray. *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic.* 1st ed. New
    York: Times Books, 2006.

Teicher, Howard and Gayle Radley Teicher. *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm: America's
    Flawed Vision in the Middle East from Nixon to Bush.* New York: William Morrow
    and Co., 1993.

United Nations. "Charter of the United Nations." United Nations.
    <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/> (April 3, 2008).

United States, Central Intelligence Agency. *National Intelligence Estimate: The Soviet
    Role in the Arab World.* Washington D.C.: April 24, 1963,
    <http://www.foia.cia.gov> (December 29, 2007).

———. *Soviet Military Resupply Activities in the Middle East,* Washington, D.C.:
    December, 1973, <http://www.foia.cia.gov> (December 29, 2007).

———. *The USSR and the Arab Oil Weapon.* Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence
    Agency, December 7, 1973, <http://www.foia.cia.gov> (December 29, 2007).

———. "The 2008 World Factbook: Iran."
    <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>. (March
    30, 2008).

———. "The 2008 World Factbook: Iraq."
    <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html> (March
    30, 2008).

———. "The 2008 World Factbook: Saudi Arabia."
    <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html> (March
    30, 2008).

United States, National Intelligence Council. "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities,"
    National Intelligence Estimate, November 2007.
    <http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf> (January 8, 2008).

United States, Economic Intelligence Committee. *Economic Implications of the Denial of
    Middle East Oil.* May 8, 1956 <http://www.foia.cia.gov> (December 29, 2007).

Van Evera, Stephen. "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War." *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*. Edited by Robert J. Art, and Kenneth N. Waltz. 6th ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

Wallace, Mike. "Iranian Leader Opens Up , Ahmadinejad Speaks Candidly With Mike Wallace About Israel, Nukes, Bush." CBS News, August 13, 2006. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/08/09/60minutes/main1879867.shtml> (June 5, 2006).

Walt, Stephen M. *The Origins of Alliances*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

———. "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power." *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3-43.

Waltz, Kenneth N. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better*. Adelphi Papers. Vol. 171. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981.

———. *Theory of International Politics*. McGraw-Hill, 1979.

"What is the World Trade Organization?" <http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/fact1_e.htm> (December 4, 2007).

Wirtz, James J. and James A. Russell. "U.S. Policy on Preventive War and Preemption. The Nonproliferation Review." Vol 10, Issue 1, Spring 2003,113-123. <http://www.informaworld.com/10.1080/10736700308436920> (03 June 2008).

Worth, Robert F. "Despite Infighting, Meeting of Arab Leaders Gets Under Way in Damascus." *The New York Times*, March 30, 2008, sec. International / Middle East. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/30/world/middleeast/30arab.html> (May 10, 2008).

Wright, Robin. "Iranian Flow Of Weapons Increasing, Officials Say." *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2007.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

1.   Defense Technical Information Center
        Ft. Belvoir, Virginia

2.   Dudley Knox Library
        Naval Postgraduate School
        Monterey, California

3.   Marine Corps Representative
        Naval Postgraduate School
        Monterey, California

4.   Director, Training and Education, MCCDC, Code C46
        Quantico, Virginia

5.   Director, Marine Corps Research Center, MCCDC, Code C40RC
        Quantico, Virginia

6.   Marine Corps Tactical Systems Support Activity (Attn: Operations Officer)
        Camp Pendleton, California